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ABSTRACT

By examining 12 new middle school programs in 7 school districts in various regions of the United States, this study focuses on how decision-making and planning processes were reflected in grade reorganizations. From interviews with decision-makers involved in each of the cases, the new middle school programs were observed first for their solutions to problems of instructional design in middle schools, including scheduling and teacher role. The issues of the social forces influencing the reorganizations, the making of the decisions to create middle schools, and the planning stages lead to considering such policy influences as the effects of desegregation and declining enrollment. Drawing from the case studies, the authors also make concrete suggestions for future middle school development in such areas as initial decision-making and the stages of planning. Finally, the strengths and drawbacks of those changes studied here are clarified, and general principles are cited for success in middle school implementation. (JW)

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REORGANIZING THE MIDDLE GRADES

Guidelines for Administrators, School Boards, and Planning Teams

James A. Molitor and Robert A. Dentler

December 1982

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Above all, this report resulted from the voluntary contributions of information, experience, and practical knowledge by parents, school board members, school administrators, and teachers in the seven public school systems we visited. We cannot thank these persons by name, for we pledged confidentiality of sources in this project. Without their candor and their hospitality toward visiting scholars, this study would not have been possible.

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1
The Middle Grades in American Public Education

Introduction

Schooling in the United States is not a system but a conglomerate of people and settings which varies greatly across localities and over time. Across thousands of locally controlled school systems, schooling is tremendously dynamic: not only are goals, practices, and structures being changed continually, but changes often get advocated and spread from one location to many others.

Under the auspices of the National Institute of Education, we began to study one of those changes in 1980. The change in question is the reorganization of grade structure in order to plan and implement middle schools. Many, indeed thousands, of middle schools have come into being in American public school districts since 1960, and many communities are now giving active consideration to creating them. We did not try in our study to answer the question of whether middle schools are a good thing educationally. We tried instead to gather and sift evidence from a small national sample of public school districts in order to discern regularities in the change process itself. Our goal was to illuminate the conditions under which decisions are made, plans laid, and implementation begun, as well as to note some of the consequences that result from the planning and startup process.

Our purpose was practical. We wanted to learn whether there were regular features to the process which, if summarized and interpreted, would help communities organize decision making, planning, and implementation in ways that would facilitate their abilities to get good results from their efforts.

Our concern with process stems from several notions about educational change. One is that there is no "best" solution to an issue such as grade structure. There were benefits and costs associated with the kindergarten or first grade through eighth grade schools that dotted the American landscape for a century before the advent of the junior high school. Thousands of K-8 schools continue to flourish in both public and nonpublic settings today. Grade structures alone do not enhance or depress educational benefits, though there may be some outer limit on this notion. For example, a school with a single grade tends to deprive students of exposure to an age mix, just as a school that contains all grades from K to 12 tends to sacrifice the stimulus to learning that can come from a change of scene. When a community

changes from one grade structure to another, however, we are convinced that the change nearly always signifies something more than a belief in the merits of a different grade grouping.

Our second notion is that a change in a tangible factor such as grade grouping depends for its educational value on the content and quality of the process through which it gains expression. The ninth grade in a district can be relocated out of junior high schools and placed in a senior high building, for example, with barely a single change in any ongoing programs for ninth graders or others. Or, it can be an occasion for redesigning both junior and senior high school programs from top to bottom. A change in grade structures thus becomes educationally significant only when the decision and planning processes become focal points for social action.

Our third notion is that the process of changeover to middle schools cannot be understood, let alone undertaken somewhere else, without an understanding of the thicket of issues with which school boards and staff must cope. Grade structures of any kind may be seen as a kind of "steady state" in a school environment. For that "state" to change, a veritable tangle of impinging events – for example, enrollment decline – must be perceived as treatable by this singular course of action.

Our final notion is that a middle school model cannot be prescribed. Grade structuring, when attached to other issues, expresses local adult attitudes about child development, youth policy, social controls over age groups, and many related themes pertinent to local subcultures. So, too, educators carry extremely diverse attitudes about when the child-centered curriculum should give way to discipline-centered studies and when academic achievement takes priority over social growth. By studying the process, we hoped to avoid prescribing a model, although aspects of the contemporary ideal for *advocates* of middle school programs are described to clarify the substance of the programs that we studied.

This report is aimed at the many people who are currently involved in planning or considering a shift to middle schools. These include school board members, district- and school-level administrators, and teachers and parents who become involved in local planning teams. Our aim is to provide them with concrete and practical suggestions for decision making, planning and implementation, based on our own detailed research in twelve new middle schools.

The report is also intended for educational researchers interested in major, planned change in schools and districts. For them we provide additional insight into the internal and external forces impinging on all phases of the local change process, highlighting some of the potential sources for slippage between initial decisions and final implementation.

Finally, the report is directed at middle school advocates interested in the extent to which various components of the middle school model are implemented. For them we provide a contrast to the many published reports on "exemplary" middle school programs, for this report focuses on middle schools in more "typical" situations – where educational aims for the shift are secondary to harder economic and political considerations in an era of fiscal decline and retrenchment.

We begin in this chapter with a brief review of the development of the middle school movement. We then review the most common elements desired in middle school programs and observed in the twelve recently established programs that we studied. Finally, we provide concrete suggestions for the entire change process – from assessing needs, problems or opportunities, to making and implementing decisions, to monitoring and evaluating the resulting programs. We also include brief, descriptive vignettes drawn from our field research on the twelve new schools.

Many advocates of middle school programs seem to have a shared vision of what middle schools should be. That vision has shaped the local decision process in many ways, as we shall show.

The Trend toward Middle Schools

To understand the American middle school movement, we must see it as an outgrowth of the American junior high school which, in turn, sprang up out of the evolution of the public high school. In this country the public high school took essentially its present form in the 1880s. From that time until secondary education became more democratic following World War I, public high schools enrolled only about 20 percent of the relevant age groups, and fewer than 20 percent of those enrolled actually pursued college preparatory studies. Thus, the public high school built its original curriculum around instruction for only about 4 percent of the youth population.

This highly selective focus became central to the public high school as an institution. It reflected teachers' concerns with developing continuous, widely acceptable ties with higher education by preparing youth to undertake classical and scientific studies in college (see Til, 1970, for a more detailed discussion). Practical studies were short-changed or omitted, and the developing emphasis on accreditation greatly intensified the salience of the classical curriculum. Vocational training developed as an adjunct to the public high school as a response to manpower needs disclosed by mobilizations for World War I, but rapidly evolved into a separate subsystem. For example, in northeastern states the pattern of Latin high schools, English high schools, and trade schools for the non-college bound developed.

The public junior high school developed in the West and Midwest between 1910 and 1930 as a three-year school consisting of grades 7–9. Its initial purpose was "early differentiation": the sifting out, by trial, of vocationally oriented from college bound youth. It also tried to resolve the dilemma of what to do with early adolescents. Many believed that early adolescents were held back by the K–8 schools, while others felt ninth graders were too immature for high school. Over the next fifty years this innovation became commonplace, though the grade structure varied from 6–8 to 7–9. The aim of providing a transition from elementary to high school was widely proclaimed.

There were flaws in the design of the public junior high from its very beginnings, however. Far from achieving programmatic independence, its faculties were often

an uneasy mix of high school teachers who wanted to teach in the high school and elementary school teachers who remained child-centered (see Chiara and Johnson, 1972; Schoo, 1974; Hoffman, 1977; and Zdanowicz, 1976, for more detail). Moreover, as the proportion of youth continuing on to twelfth grade expanded from about 20 percent in 1929 to 70 percent in 1960, the principle of early differentiation was overrun.

In the early 1960s, suburbanization, rural school consolidation, and the Sputnik challenge were additional spurs to the development of junior high alternatives. Affluent suburban districts like Scarsdale, New York, for instance, constructed large unified junior high schools for grades 6-8, with a faculty, curriculum, and physical plant adequate for the task of intense academic preparation. During the same period, as consolidated regional high schools were built in the hinterlands, intermediate schools were constructed alongside them.

The junior high school had performed an important mission between 1910 and 1950. It had served to broaden the range of youth prepared to go on to high school. It had provided a testing and sifting ground for those who chose to withdraw from school after eighth or ninth grade. And, it extended downward the intellectual resources of the more academic disciplines through courses in general science, literature, history, rhetoric, and even first year algebra. As the senior high schools expanded to host 60 and later 80 percent of all adolescents, and as elementary schools became more comprehensive in their curricular scope, the special mission of the American junior high school began to erode.

Fostering the erosion from within the junior highs was the nagging sense of a disjuncture between the departmentalized formalities of the program inherited from the early years of the century and the observable social, affective, and physical needs and interests of 10 to 14 year olds. And, by the 1960s, as senior high schools began to cast about for explanations for soaring dropout and pushout rates, junior high schools often took an excessive share of blame for the problem.

Several waves of policy change since 1960 have also affected the junior highs. For example, grade restructuring was used in the 1960s and 1970s as a means of desegregation and decentralization. Towards the end of that period it also became a tool for achieving economies of scale. As enrollments declined, some junior highs closed and disappeared, and school districts began to reconsider the K-8 configuration. Other junior highs lost their ninth grades to high schools as enrollment declines continued into the late 1970s.

As waves of policy change washed over the junior highs, old questions about their program aims were revived. These questions were made more urgent by new knowledge about the developmental stage of early adolescence (see Til, 1970; Schoo, 1974; Fenwick, 1977, and Thornburg, 1981). Physically, psychologically, and socially, young people appear to be maturing earlier. Also, in terms of social, psychological, and emotional maturity, the greatest similarity among students in the sixth through tenth grades exists between those in grades six and seven and between those in grades nine and ten (Schoo, 1974). Similarly, it is in these grades that we find the greatest variability in levels of maturity among individuals in the same age group. Other research has suggested that youngsters ages 10 to 14, in contrast to

both younger children and older teenagers, have comparatively little ability to acquire new cognitive skills and information, as their brains prepare for a growth spurt between ages 15 and 18 (Epstein and Toepfer, 1978).

Midwestern state education agencies and universities began to interest themselves in preparing teachers and programs of instruction which fit the special developmental needs of early adolescents. This trend was reinforced by the emphasis on competency based education, where research evidence showed that special objectives had to be built into the instructional programs of sixth through eighth graders. Reforms in teacher certification began to follow.

The junior high school had rested on several foundations: (a) early differentiation, (b) discipline-centered courses of study, (c) exploration of work skills, and (d) rehearsal of the rudiments of high school academic and social life. As these foundations began to shake in the 1960s, the idea of the middle school emerged as an alternative. Some of its critics may feel that the middle school lacks a philosophy and a program to educate its pupils (Schoo, 1974); yet several elements of the middle school "ideal" may be discerned:

1. The middle school begins in the sixth grade, presumably because students are maturing earlier (Fenwick, 1977).
2. All students are prepared for high school.
3. Vocationalism is replaced by school-wide exploration of careers.
4. Some courses in skill subjects remain academic, but others are activity based.
5. Courses in the language arts and mathematics do not imitate high school courses but treat skill deficits.

In some districts the middle school idea has been further elaborated to include ungraded structures, interdisciplinary learning themes, individually prescribed and paced learning, team teaching, and the injection of school counseling and guidance services. Similarly, the idea has included expanded inservice education for the faculty, expanded parent involvement, and reforms in school/community relations (Slate, 1975; Kealy, 1971; Flinker and Pianko, 1971; and Chiara and Johnson, 1972; for a discussion of what the experts think makes a good middle school, see Brown, 1981).

Efforts to promulgate the middle school have taken on the attributes of a social movement cohering around several frequently expressed aims. In the literature, these aims are usually referred to as "the philosophy of middle schools." Typical expressions of these aims are as follows:

1. The middle school program should emphasize individual personal growth. It should be "child-oriented" rather than "subject-oriented."
2. The middle school program should focus on the "whole child" and encourage his development in all areas: physical, social, intellectual, and emotional.
3. The middle school program should adapt to the great differences in maturity, learning styles, and levels of ability among children in the middle grades.

4. The middle school program should emphasize broad learning and exploration. The program should avoid premature specialization or channelling of student interests.
5. The middle school program should focus on the continued development of basic skills and critical thinking and learning skills. There should be less emphasis on the acquisition of specific information in the content areas.
6. The middle school program should emphasize integration of information within and across subject areas.
7. The middle school program should be distinctive from other levels of education, and provide a smooth transition from the self-contained elementary classroom to the more complex environment of the senior high.
8. The middle school program should recognize the increased sophistication of today's children, yet avoid placing them in social situations for which they are not ready.

In fact, however, very little about the idea of a middle school actually requires a change in label or in grade structures and facilities. An alert and informed junior high or K-8 faculty can make changes in pedagogy and in interpersonal climates without a change in grade organization. (See Gruhn, 1960, for a defense of the junior high; see Jones, 1981, for advocacy of the K-8 model.) Still, the change in name and grade structure is often a starting point for changes in policy and practice. At several of the new middle schools in our study, administrators frankly admitted that without being able to claim they were setting up something *new*, they would not have been able to make the changes that they did.

To be sure, there are many cases in which no deep program changes are intended, and where the labelling and grade changes are mere acts of convenience to meet exogenous conditions. For example, middle schools are frequently established in response to desegregation orders; this was the case in some of the schools in our study. In extensive black areas of de facto housing segregation, the desegregation of elementary schools may be almost impossible. However, the older children from such areas may be able to travel to more distant schools. Thus, in 1965 New York City announced its intent to move from a 6-3-3 grade organization to a 5-3-4 organization. In still other instances, openings of middle schools are responses to overcrowded or underutilized facilities (Curtis, 1966, provides a more detailed discussion), or to such shortcomings of junior high schools as victimization and violence to both students and faculty (see Gottfredson and Daiger, 1979, and NIE, 1977, for more full treatment of these problems in junior high schools). The point is that the advent of a middle school in some cases involves little more than the movement of children and a change in the sign on the front of the building. (Also see Schoo, 1974; Gatswirth, 1966; Johnson, 1963; for a collection of relevant articles see Barnett, Handel, and Weser, 1968; for a look into the future, see George, 1981.)

A recent book by Alexander and George (1981) suggests that the middle school movement is still alive and well, citing a vast increase in the number of operating middle schools between the late 1960s and late 1970s and the establishment of the National Middle School Association as well as many state and local associations. Slowness of progress is not in the numbers of middle schools, but in the

development of their instructional programs, a conclusion supported by our research. We also came independently to another of their conclusions: the greatest program need is for trained personnel who are committed to the education of this particular age group, a problem which keeps many supposed middle schools all too close to the junior high model.

Middle Schools in Our Study

Our study included twelve new middle school programs, observed in various stages of the decision making, planning, and implementation process. The schools were identified by making a series of phone calls to state and local education agencies and asking if they knew of recent or planned conversions to middle schools. Over sixty schools in forty districts were identified and the districts contacted to determine their willingness to participate in the study. Twelve schools in seven districts were then selected, based on their willingness to participate, their reasons for making the shift, and the timing of implementation. Specifically, we chose no schools more than two years into implementation, and several which were still in the planning stage.

All seven districts were visited in the fall and winter of 1980–81 to capture the decision making and planning processes and – for districts that had already implemented – to study the first several months of implementation in the new schools. Districts that had not yet implemented in 1980–81 were visited again in the fall and winter of 1981–82 to study implementation of the new programs after they had had at least two months to settle in.

Geographically dispersed, the twelve schools were found in rural and suburban New England, urban and suburban Mid-Atlantic locations, and urban and suburban midwestern sites. Most had had little or no prior experience with implementing major change programs at the district or school level, and with two exceptions, represented changes from districts with a standard 6–3–3 grade organizational pattern. The exceptions were interesting hodgepodges of grade organizations: K–2, 3–5, K–8, 7–9, 10–12, and 9–12 coexisting in the same districts, with predictable problems in curriculum scope and sequence to add complexity to the change process.

Relations between the schools and their communities were generally good, although in the midwestern sites the schools were closely scrutinized by the Moral Majority, which happened to be strong in both of the communities studied. The new middle schools ran the gamut of 5–8, 6–8, and 7–8 grade organization patterns, and were located in the full range from low SES black neighborhoods to very affluent white professional bedroom communities. One district was under Federal court desegregation orders.

Exhibit 1 provides brief descriptions of the twelve sites. We will provide additional descriptive vignettes as we move through the rest of this volume. These will be included to illustrate the activities involved in moving from the initial decision

through the implementation phase. They will also illuminate the often interesting outcomes of these activities, giving special attention to some of the snags and pitfalls.

A Note on Methods

This inquiry was grounded upon the application of symbolic interaction theory to the analysis of educational policy and practice. Middle schools emerge within policy contexts that are highly ambiguous. That is to say that decisions to reorganize grades and to change programs of instruction are made within frameworks of environmental uncertainty, overlapping and contending issues of resource availability and use, and divergent definitions of underlying problems. As Estes and Edmonds (1981, p. 81) have noted, "In an ambiguous policy framework *the process becomes the policy outcome* – that is, the outcome is generated in the process, so that the policy is the process." We will see in later chapters how the process determines the outcomes in conversions to middle schools.

The symbolic interaction perspective emphasizes close attention to the emergence of *unexpected* actions and interpretations. It examines "multiple realities" within communities rather than some single purpose or uniform consensus on policies. It relies on the legitimacy of observation and on the importance local actors themselves ascribe to events within their communities. Their ideas about what is desirable educationally and about what they think is possible or impossible comprise the base of our analysis.

The topic of middle schools, to our delight, emerged as an ideal topic to approach in this way. The decision to convert to middle schools affects and draws upon a deeply felt host of issues – who shall go where to school, who shall teach what and how, what facilities will be used or eliminated, what resources should go toward the middle years, for example. And yet, the vision of the middle school is flexible enough to combine treatment of these issues in many ways. Many educational change topics do not share these ramifying implications.

Our research was designed to address a number of questions relevant to the decision making, planning, and implementation of the new middle schools, namely:

Decision Making

1. What was the original impetus to consider switching from junior high schools to middle or intermediate schools?
2. What individuals and/or groups participated in or attempted to influence the decision? Why? With what impact, on what issues?
3. What disagreements existed? Were they resolved? If so, how? If not, why not?
4. What information was used to inform the final decision? Reports? District records? Expert advice? Law or legal precedent?

Exhibit 1

Site Demographic and Building Characteristics

District Name (pseudonym)	District Setting	Reasons for Shift to Middle Schools	School Name (pseudonym)	Physical Plant and Grade Levels of New Middle School
Logswood	Very small, rural New England site in logging and paper mill area	1. obsolete facilities	Logswood	New building, designed as 5-8 middle school
Burns	Small New England city, primarily blue-collar white population, growing Hispanic population	1. utilization of facilities 2. education aims 3. declining enrollments	Burns East	Renovated elementary school building, 6-8
			Burns West	Renovated large old high school building, 6-8
Britewater	Small New England city, large young professional population	1. utilization of facilities 2. education aims	Britewater	Former junior high, 6-8
Chapeau	Bedroom suburb of major Mid-Atlantic city, mixed SES population	1. declining enrollments 2. education aims	Chapeau	Former junior high, 6-8
Great Port	One of the great Mid-Atlantic port cities, large minority population.	1. community concern over problems with safety and disorder at junior highs 2. desegregation	Bell Highlands	Renovated junior high 7-9 (expected to move toward 6-8)
			Drywater	Renovated elementary building now housing a K-3 elementary school and a 6-8 middle school
Oz City	Medium size, very conservative midwestern city with significant minority representation	1. declining enrollments 2. desegregation	Bowlers	Renovated elementary building, 7-8
			Jacob	New building, designed as 7-8 middle school
			Mandelle	Former junior high, 7-8
Rurbanville	Suburb of large midwestern city, includes both industrial areas and farmland	1. declining enrollments	Northern	Former junior high, 6-8
			Old Line	Former junior high, 6-8

5. What influence, if any, did the original impetus have on the final decision?
6. What was the final decision? How much detail and direction for planning and implementation were included? What decisions, if any, were made regarding facilities? What decisions were made regarding selection of administrators and staff? What considerations were given to cost?
7. What were the reactions to the final decision among the various individuals and/or groups who had participated in the decision making process or who were likely to be affected by it?

Planning

1. Who was involved in the actual planning, and how did they interpret their responsibilities? Was the interpretation consistent with the directions provided by the board?
2. What resources were (a) sought and (b) utilized by the planners? Which ones were the most important? Least important?
3. Were theoretical/pedagogical perspectives, that is, assumptions about youth and effective or appropriate teaching strategies, explicitly considered? Which were accepted and which were rejected, and why?
4. What plans were actually developed? Did they require formal approval? Were specific goals and objectives identified?
5. Were provisions made for introducing the plans to members of the staff and parents who were not involved in the planning? What were their reactions to these plans?
6. Was all planning done by the same group? If not, what were the responsibilities of each group and how were they coordinated, if at all?

Implementation

1. What did the new schools actually look like in terms of staff, students, and programs?
2. What problems were encountered in implementing the original plan, and what modifications, if any, were necessary?
3. Were the faculty, administrators, and students satisfied? What problems did they identify?
4. What provisions, if any, were made for monitoring first year activities?

Stated most briefly, the data collection and analysis used in this study involved the development of twelve case studies which were longitudinal in nature. That is, the focus of the data collection was on the nature and content of the decision making and planning processes in the school districts under study, as well as on the actual implementation of the new organization and programs. In general, data collection occurred through the use of focused but unstructured face-to-face interviews with a variety of respondents. Respondents included representatives of such interest groups as the superintendent or assistant superintendent, members of the school board, principals, teachers, parents, and members of any decision making or

planning committee associated with the changeover. If the change involved the construction or serious renovation of physical plants, we also interviewed city or town hall officials.

Access to sensitive on-site information was facilitated by our emphasis upon cross-site rather than single-site analysis. This helped us to assure all districts of confidentiality. In our experience, it is very difficult to make a case study entirely confidential, but it is relatively easy to do so in a cross-site analysis, even with brief illustrative vignettes.

2
Design Features of the Middle School

Introduction

This report would make little sense to most readers without a chapter on what a middle school is supposed to comprise, according to the educators whose best thinking has built the foundation for the middle school movement. This chapter, then, summarizes the pedagogical design features as concisely as possible.

We use the term "features" to refer to the fact that while the elements are interrelated, they are also detachable in a way that fits the consumer marketing process in America. A local planning team looks over the showroom and chooses the basic model along with anywhere from none to a dozen optional features. "Design" refers to the properties themselves – multi-age grouping, for example, or formation of planning teams among teachers. "Pedagogy" refers to the strong emphasis, in most advocacy for middle schools, on the idea that the features are expressly designed to affect the treatment of early adolescent learners. By analogy, if this were a matter of architectural design, middle school advocates would stress that the form is meant to enhance the growth of young adolescents. The pedagogy of middle school design extends well beyond the curriculum and the programs of instruction, as we shall show.

The Basic Model

A middle school is a setting where early adolescent students ages 10 to 14 are enrolled. The grades spanned by the middle school may be 5–8, 6–8, or 7–8, and the designers customarily define it as covering no more than five grades and as usually including grades 6 and 7. A middle school may be housed in a K–8 facility, a junior high facility, or even a 7–12 high school facility, but its basic feature is a program aimed at meeting the developmental needs and interests of this special age group. The aim of a middle school program is *not* simply to extend the elementary years, nor is it merely to prepare preadolescents for high school.

The issue of designing a program especially *for* early adolescents is most often treated not in terms of curriculum theory, but as a matter of teacher team formation. Although this varies across districts, the basic model involves the organization of teams of teachers including one English, one social studies, one

science, and one mathematics teacher per team. Each team is assigned to teach from 90 to 125 students in one grade level for four periods a day, five days a week. The team is expected to stay within curriculum guidelines set by the district but may vary the ways of teaching to fit the team's predilections and the cluster of students.

Organization of teachers into interdisciplinary teams is central to the primary goal of the middle school: providing a program that ties elementary and high school together in a more smooth and continuous way. In the elementary school with its self-contained classrooms, each teacher works with a single group of students, planning and managing the group's instructional program in all subjects all alone. At the high school, teachers rarely develop such relationships with their students, and substantive sophistication of knowledge at that level makes it difficult to cross disciplinary lines.

To smooth the passage between elementary and high school, while providing a unique learning experience for early adolescents, the middle school is comprised of interdisciplinary teams of teachers. The teachers on the teams share the responsibility for planning, instruction, and evaluating student progress in more than one academic area, to the same group of students on the same schedule. Teachers on the teams are usually located close together in one area of the school building. However, the emphasis here is on interdisciplinary team *organization:* interdisciplinary team *teaching* is quite another, and much rarer, matter.

There are many obvious advantages to such team organization. The combined knowledge and abilities of the members theoretically enable educational planning of all kinds, while simultaneously providing intellectual stimulation to the teachers. It can also minimize the amount of damage done by less skillful faculty and provide a more balanced, holistic assessment of each pupil's progress.

There are problems, however. Team planning time and space are essential, and this may tighten the noose on scheduling. Interdisciplinary team organization takes more teacher time because individual teachers require the usual amount of time for their own efforts, plus whatever additional time team activities require. Teams also need some autonomy, and skills in planning and communication. Teachers who cannot plan as a group simply will not do it. Some teachers will find the interpersonal dynamics of cooperative team functioning beyond their ability and the entire experience will be harrowing and painful. For these reasons, staff development with prospective middle school teachers is essential, particularly for those coming from years of junior or senior high experience.

Exploratory Courses

The characteristic exploratory courses of junior high schools have long been art, music, home economics, and industrial arts. These are called exploratory for two reasons: to distinguish them from the more formally demanding courses in high school and to denote the worth of giving young adolescents a chance to try out their interests by sampling these fields. Even the basic middle grade program tends to

continue this feature from the junior high tradition, and some districts enlarge and improve on it. Many put foreign language instruction under this rubric, while others add business education, career education, speech and drama, and physical education. Many elective options may now be included as required courses under the exploratory element.

Required exploratory courses may lead to problems, especially in middle schools that stress the basic academic teams heavily. We saw six middle schools where the exploratory faculty had been lumped together rather than assigned to teams. The exploratory teachers were therefore left feeling segregated from the team-based mainstream of faculty life. Exploratory courses suffer from other design drawbacks as well. For example, foreign language teachers may find their classes filled with reluctant learners, as every student is now supposed to be "exposed" to a foreign language. Moreover, the scheduling of exploratory courses is often subordinated to the teams. In one of our schools, for example, a shop teacher felt drained by having to teach the same lesson fifteen times a week.

The middle school advocates imagine the exploratory options as crucial, not incidental to their pedagogy. These courses are supposed to enrich and enliven the curriculum, and the vision aims at providing more special learning opportunities for larger numbers of students. Two forces work against this, we found: the stress on low-budget basics tends to diminish rather than expand exploratory opportunities; and the former junior high teachers of shop, music, and art, many of whom took their joy from ninth grade classes, now come to feel like service course drones who yearn to follow ninth graders to the high school.

Activities

Another common design feature is special interest activities. By design, these are supposed to be expressions of teacher and student interests. Students might ask to try guitar playing, for example, and a guitar-playing teacher will structure this a bit and then engage two hours a week in informal sharing of the activity. The activities can be drawn from hobbies, arts and crafts, board or card games, play, physical competition, or speech and drama, to name a few. In design theory, activity periods are intended to set aside grading and testing, to encourage student planning and leadership, and to encourage mingling across clusters and grade levels in the best sense of open education.

The problem with the activity periods is that teachers play them down: we did not see a single instance where teachers made very much out of these periods. At their lowest level, the activities would be called Reading and consist of forty-five minutes of sitting quietly, looking at or even silently reading books or magazines students carried with them. Many teachers regarded these as "decompression periods" after a busy day. One teacher showed his slides from a trip to Alaska.

The cause of the problem seems to be that, in practice, the basic teams and the required exploratory courses consume the thirty hour school week and press

activities into the cracks and corners that remain. No doubt some exemplary middle schools find ways to balance this option effectively, but we did not find teachers who were enthusiastic about it.

Curriculum Integration

Junior high schools traditionally organize into departmental faculties based on disciplines. As departmental boundaries harden over time, content and skill integration become difficult to arrange and co-teaching across fields is possible but rare. One of the aims of middle school designers has been to reorganize in ways that will optimize integration, in the belief that this is appropriate for the cognitive needs of early adolescents.

There are two theoretical variations on this option. In one, the aim is to build an integrated core curriculum. Here, all students would move – often the hope is for individualized pace of learning – through a spiralling sequence of units in which the interdependence of the areas is experienced again and again. An exploratory course in metalwork would become an occasion for blending skills from mathematics, science, and drafting, for example. Units in social studies would embrace readings from English and projects using measurement and scientific inquiry methods.

In the second variation, individual teams would collaborate on units so that English and social studies are combined in one unit and math and science in another; or physical educators would collaborate in unifying health education with life science or exercise with the dramatic arts. This approach is closer to the best of elementary school practice, where teachers often experiment in this way.

Like other components of the complete middle school design, curricular integration has a problem associated with its implementation: relatively few school systems seem to know how to achieve it. There are both structural and attitudinal reasons for this. Structurally, the legacy of departmental organization handed down from junior high schools is difficult to shake off. For example, several of the middle schools we studied retained organization by academic department for all grade levels. One 5-8 middle school used self-contained instruction in the lower grades, but teams and passing between rooms in the upper grades. Understandably, the blocked (rather than integrated) curriculum and departmentalized organizational structure reflect and reinforce each other.

The attitudinal dimension is also compelling for at least two reasons. First, in the frequent case where the middle school faculty includes former junior and, occasionally, senior high teachers, we often found these teachers very concerned about dilution of their academic specialty in the new program. Thus, the idea of curricular integration raises old professional anxieties. The second reason is related to the first and lies in the short shrift given to inservice training of teachers prior to implementation. Consequently, though teachers in our schools were grouped into interdisciplinary teams and usually given the flexibility (if not the mandate) to integrate their substantive areas, most of them simply did not know how to do it

and had no one to tell them. In their team planning meetings, they studiously ignored matters of curriculum and teaching methodology.

Discipline

In the junior high school, discipline was assigned to a dean of students or a vice principal. Faculty participated through classroom management of rules of conduct, but violators were usually sent to see the dean. Suspension and expulsion were common penalties. By the late 1960s, student unrest and countercultural styles had moved downward in age from college to high school and had begun to make a shambles out of this relatively thin and attenuated line of defense in thousands of junior high schools.

Middle school theorists assume that a well organized school with effective instructional programs generates a climate in which "negative affect" and misconduct tend to become rare. Parents and administrators who worry about the erosion of adult authority and the dangers of adolescence do not settle for this assumption, however.

The basic team model radically changes the conditions for exercise of adult controls over student conduct. A team of teachers comes to know its cluster of 100 students very well. It has daily planning time in which to match notes on students. Allegations about "problem behavior" are raised and tested. In some teams, a card file is kept and notes are made on record cards as a check system. Often, teams develop and post rules of conduct on their classroom walls. Teams can call in parents for conferences and meet with them as a team, rather than one-on-one.

Although suspension is generally supplanted by in-school detention or other less exclusionary measures, the middle school can still become as controlled a disciplinary milieu as the teachers desire. Without exception, our sample of twelve middle schools were observably quiet, safe, and socially very controlled settings. While not denigrating this achievement – which is certainly preferable to the "blackboard jungle" stereotype of some junior high schools, we are disturbed by the likelihood that in some settings opportunities for social control could be misused and permit little or no deviation from certain narrowly defined values, viewpoints, and behavior. This need not be the case, of course, wherever teachers (with parental acceptance) choose a less controlling approach. But our aim here is to point out that school boards, parents, and administrators are quick to see the middle school as a mode of organizing to accomplish whatever level of control over conduct they desire.

Teachers-as-Advisors

Among advocates a middle school is not authentic unless it includes the feature of teachers-as-advisors. The theory is that every young adolescent needs to have a relationship with at least one concerned, understanding adult in the school who

knows her well and who offers guidance. Usually, guidance counselors are kept in the staff design while teachers share in their function through advisor-advisee sessions built into the schedule.

Although we know of many middle schools where this feature is a capstone of the design, we found it practiced in only one of our twelve sites. We saw its ascribed importance and we also saw schools where it had been planned and then dropped later on.

The problem with implementing teachers-as-advisors has at least three aspects. One is that team teachers become, if anything, overly familiar with their students in a term and the advisor concept tends to become redundant, particularly in schools with fewer than about 800 students. A second reason is that, in the Midwest at least, some local Moral Majority groups have protested the feature on the grounds that teachers may preempt the parental role and because advising deals with ethic-religious beliefs at some levels. A third reason is that middle school teachers in a district coping with scarce resources are apt to be overworked and to resist extending their responsibility. Even Alexander and George (1981), for all of their enthusiasm for the feature, remark:

> *The advisor-advisee program is possibly the most attractive part of the entire middle school concept, but it seems to be the most difficult thing to implement successfully. . . . Many middle schools have begun with such programs only to find the idea scrapped after a year, sometimes in several months or even weeks. (p. 104)*

Block Scheduling

Elementary schools tend to operate through large amounts of time spent under one teacher in a self-contained classroom. Comprehensive high schools, in contrast, operate on complex modular schedules which move students about a great deal and which enable the fitting of at least eleven diverse fields of study into a thirty-five period week. The ideal of the middle school is to facilitate a smooth transition between these two ways of managing time and school space. The ideal may be achieved in a variety of ways, but team teachers should have the ability to alter their share of the daily time frame in order to suit their planning.

Great ingenuity has been expended on scheduling middle school operations, and the craft has been elevated to a science entailing computer applications, always with a view to serving the ideals cited above. The realization of the importance in learning of "time on task," namely, that there is a measurable effect in basic skill areas between amounts of time expended in classrooms on group instructional interaction and achievement levels, has combined in middle schools with a sense that time frames can be controlled at will, to generate astonishing varieties of scheduling.

Some of these have comical side effects. At one of our sites, only the principal's office retained a master set of student schedules, and five months into the school year we witnessed confused students who popped in to ask the school secretary

where they were "supposed to be" next. At another school, the assistant principal posted the day on each entry door because a *six* day rather than a five day cycle was used. Hence, students could arrive on a Monday morning and see from the posting that it was now "Day 4" in the cycle. At others, students stayed in one room for four hours of six every day while the teachers zipped about, some of them pushing grocery carts of materials because the schedule was such as to prevent them from working at any one desk for a morning or an afternoon.

Scheduling becomes variegated and complex in most middle schools because of the interplay between space, logistics, fields, and diagnostic refinements of student needs. The principal must be a skilled planner of time and space uses in order to achieve the balance between daily stability and variety that fits the developmental needs of early adolescents.

The problem with block scheduling is that many of the middle school facilities in our study were not built for sophisticated forms of time management. Many are former elementary plants, built like egg crates and meant to emphasize closed, self-contained classrooms. Many others are converted junior highs, where rooms were clustered by fields and now must be used by multi-field teams. The theorists believe that through lots of planning and staff development, scheduling is a tool that can be used to surmount these problems of inappropriate space and equipment layouts.

Our field observations suggest to us that this overstates the case and that scheduling can become so adaptively inventive as to create a kind of mechanical beehive of timed movement. Exploratory courses seem especially vulnerable to this strain, as they are fitted into the cracks and corners of the master schedule. We also did not see a single middle school where the ambience was relaxed. Instead, the regimen of "getting through the schedule" seemed to work against the very balance that planners seek.

Parent Participation

Conventionally, parent participation in American public education is strongest in grades K–5 or K–6 and weakens steadily thereafter. Many junior high schools are not organized to respond to or to stimulate parent participation, although their co-curricular athletics and social events sometimes help. Middle schools, according to their advocates, are intended to remedy this condition. Parents are encouraged to take part in planning and, in many districts, mechanisms for expanding parent participation after implementation are emphasized. The clearest example of this comes out of the teacher team conference provision, which enables parents to talk to from two to five teachers in one individually arranged encounter. We saw plentiful evidence that this works and that parents like it. The social control feature also creates a safe, modulated behavior setting that most parents prefer.

Other arrangements become much less widely exercised, although they are known to all middle school practitioners. Activity programs, for example, may draw on

parents as speakers or skill sharers. Parents may also volunteer in offices, libraries, and even classrooms. Parent advisory committees are an option used by some districts to give boards and administrations a firm coalition with whole neighborhoods. Finally, some middle schools drew on parents to help with career explorations of work settings, and with field trips.

By extending downward in age to include 10 and 11 year olds, the middle school increases the likelihood of parental interest. A favorite topic among parents and some teachers we interviewed was how the middle school can "preserve the innocence of pre-teens." Many parents like the absence of precocity in sex roles and in "displays of false sophistication" they believe are learned from ninth graders. Parents of this persuasion enjoy visiting and volunteering in the middle schools.

There seem to be two problems associated with parental participation in middle schools. Many teachers, perhaps uncomfortable with parents after years of unpleasant encounters in junior high schools, still regard parent conferences as encounters with "the enemy." For these faculty, the fact that they may be joined in these encounters by their teaching team colleagues, the guidance counselor, and the assistant principal, changing the parent-teacher meeting into a parent-team meeting, is a welcome relief.

The second problem was candidly identified by one of the principals we interviewed. When parents actively participate in classroom settings they get to observe a sometimes embarrassing range of teacher competence. The result is invidious comparisons made in conversations with other parents, leading to subsequent arguments with the principal when their children are later assigned to the less stellar teachers' classes.

Events

The middle school philosophy questions the worth of conventional junior high school activities for 10 to 15 year olds. Advocates are particularly negative toward interscholastic sports competition, cheerleading, and dances of the kind where paired couples attend as dates. Intramurals, physical skill development, and dancing as a skill activity are highly valued, however.

With the exception of physical education, which is often treated as part of the required exploratory coursework, these activities are options adopted or rejected from district to district. We saw schools where the conventional events had been consciously deleted and where nothing was substituted. Dances had dropped away universally, but we think this had more to do with changing youth customs than with adult policies.

In theory, a middle school is intended to be a setting where early adolescent unity and cooperation are developed through inventive, shared activities. A team may sprout a name, and T-shirts may be made for all team members to wear. Teams devise logos and slogans, too. Teams share in planning field trips and these include

recreative play or adventure, not just travel to museums or points of cultural importance. Members of teams may play tournaments involving mathematics, puzzles, and quizzes. These are specially devised to require intra-group cooperation rather than individual competition. Some of the tournaments emphasize peer teaching rather than adult supervision.

Unlike junior highs, middle schools aim to *prevent* clique stratifications based on the triad of athletic powers, social popularity, and academic giftedness. The aim is to create as inclusive and mutually welcoming a student community as possible. Parental resistance to dropping the "star system" may run high, however. There is also some organizational strain between realization of this aim and the elaborate management of the six hour day. We saw schools that ran their intramurals at seven o'clock in the morning because nothing else in the schedule would give way. The schools in our sample, at least, tended to operate with a *near-zero* co-curricular and extracurricular pattern.

Report Cards

No practice is more universal in public education than the use of student grade report cards sent periodically to parents. The most common parental assumption is that the report will compare the performance of each learner with the group by field of study. Other evaluations of such things as social conduct, effort, attendance, and progress are nearly as commonly expected.

Middle schools are places where report cards begin to take on an added importance for parents. The issue of what kind of high school future to plan for their children begins to crystallize. More than this, the developmental process begins to have cumulative effects that are not noted earlier: differences between students in size, maturity, cognitive abilities and styles, and social dispositions become much more obvious. Parents worry about these apparent differences and some students go into short-term shock over their implications.

Many middle school administrators therefore try to innovate ways to report on progress which will improve on the ancient mode of comparison with the group – a group that no longer has a "meaningful" average performance in it because of developmental disparities. The favored alternatives are *criterion-referenced* evaluation, where a minimum standard is set and achievement is marked as 100 percent when the standard is met, and *progress* reporting, where the child's "personal best" becomes a standard.

There is one problem that tends to emerge from this attempt to go beyond ancient customs: teachers take the brunt of the resulting labor. In some districts, report preparation labors are added to already substantial burdens of discipline, daily planning, teamwork, and advising. There is something in the middle school concept that has a bit of the legend of the Sorcerer's Apprentice to it, and the teachers are the apprentices.

Grouping Middle School Students

In most middle schools, students are grouped conventionally, that is, by age. One or more teacher teams are created for each resulting grade, such that a teacher is part of a Sixth Grade Basic Skills Team, for example. The customary expectations about this are so deep in the national culture that few districts dare to change it.

This practice is pedagogically contradictory to the developmental foundations on which middle school advocacy is based, however. If designers could have their way (and on this feature they usually do not) they would group students by age *ranges* combined with learning levels. For example, such developmental grouping might put 9 to 11 year olds in the fifth to sixth grade team, with some 11 year olds in the 11 to 13 year old, sixth to seventh grade team, and so on.

Another alternative, one even less frequent than developmental groupings, however, is called *multi-age grouping*. It is akin to the former but exploits the team arrangement so that each student remains on the same 100 student team for the full three to four years of tenure at the school. In this way, the teachers can vary what is taught to what subgroups, thereby individualizing instruction in a deep sense, while the group does not face grade promotion issues. The teachers work to bring every student up to or beyond minimum standard by the time of movement into high school.

The grouping issue involves more than these options, moreover. Middle school designers like to use the *house plan* in large schools, for example, so that several teams will belong to one house. They may also design a *school-within-a-school*, which is the house plan written so that individual houses are nearly self-sufficient, with their own guidance counselors, exploratory teachers, etc.

Problems with groupings arise, particularly in small schools, when students are stratified by ability levels. In small schools there may be only one of each ability group at any given grade level – that is to say, only one remedial group, one regular group, etc. In such instances tracking can and does become a problem. For example, a student may need remedial math but function at grade level in other courses. This student may be placed in the remedial group and required to take remedial reading, language, and science courses he does not need, with predictable low progress and, perhaps, stigma.

Design Limitations

In our opinion as educational researchers, the design features and options of the middle school movement represent a greater source of pedagogical innovation than any other combination of changes since the advent of curriculum reform after Sputnik in 1957. They are not only profoundly impressive in scope and inventiveness; they are also rather *strategic* for the welfare of students, for the cognitive and affec-

tive casualties incurred during preadolescence are legion and have consequences that ramify well into adulthood. If one puts the complete middle school design potential on top of a structure that begins with the best of contemporary early childhood instruction and the best of primary level approaches to the basics, one can imagine a vertical program of quite extraordinary superiority to more traditional programs of the 1900 to 1960 era.

As we have tried to indicate, the ideal middle school design tries diligently to ground its pedagogy upon the great advances made in tested knowledge about human development. It sets in motion a series of mechanisms for dignifying the middle grade years, and suggests a need for preparing staff explicitly for this age group, for reconnecting the school to the community of parents, and for ameliorating the downside effects of being 12 years old in a society that makes this a time of highly stressful transition.

As Arnold (1982) noted in his review of middle school implementation results, however:

> *Virtually anyone who has visited a cross section of middle schools is forced to conclude that innovation is largely confined to organizational change and rhetoric; there has been little substantive reform. Once inside the classroom, the observor all too often encounters 'Egypt-and-flax' curriculum, strictly expository teaching, and, alas, stacks of ditto sheets. Moreover, middle school students tend to score no higher on measures of academic achievement, self-concept, and enjoyment of school than do students in junior high schools. (p. 453)*

We explore some of the reasons behind this disheartening conclusion in subsequent chapters. Here, we bring up Arnold's judgment because it parallels our research experience so exactly and because we want to consider what local pedagogical design *flaws* may contribute to this paradoxical gap between the apparent potential and the observed actual.

The main flaw does not lie, in our opinion, in the weakness of curriculum resources. The middle school literature abounds with extremely valuable and tested alternatives to "Egypt and flax," the curricularist's shorthand for boring, outdated, and vapid teaching based on guides prepared in 1930. We have pointed out some strains *between* design features as we have gone along in this chapter, a major one being the number of demands placed on teachers in an over-busy, over-planned schedule of programs. These are not very serious even when combined, however. We have seen middle schools where gifted principals iron out these wrinkles with ease over a period of a year or two.

One strain we have not examined merits much deeper study, and that is one that comes up out of the psycho-developmental foundation itself. For example, Epstein and Toepfer's (1978) review of brain growth data led them to recommend that:

> *...middle school programs must: (a) discontinue the mass introduction of novel cognitive skills to middle grade students who do not have such readiness; (b) present new cognitive information at the existing skill level of students; and (c) work to mature existing cognitive skills of middle grade learners.*

Much of the research evidence they review suggests, when put more plainly, that most 10 to 14 year olds are at comparatively low cognitive ebb as their brain enters a stage preparatory to a high growth spurt in the period from ages 15 to 18. If one adds to this the evidence from studies of social and emotional growth, there arises the possibility that instruction will have to undergo a virtual revolution in content and form if it is to be fitted to the real trends of pre- and early adolescence.

Educators remain divided on the Epstein hypothesis. Some think that Epstein and Toepfer have sounded an urgent call for a deep revision in approach, while others think that cognition itself, while it reflects developmental stages, is seamlessly similar from about age 8 through adulthood.

We do not know enough yet, we suspect, to be *able* to design a school on human developmental premises. This does not mean that the attempt should be abandoned – only that the gap between the goal statements of the middle school movement and the applicable knowledge base ought to be acknowledged. There is a danger that in continuing the hyperbole of aims, advocates may undermine teacher and parent support over the long term by seeming to claim far more than can be delivered.

An even more difficult question in the sociology of education is posed by the uncertainty about the precise nature of preadolescent cognitive and affective growth. Where the scientific evidence *is* fairly solid, it may well contradict deep, longstanding adult cultural assumptions about this stage of childhood. We picked up many clues to this in the course of our field interviews. In some communities, for example, parents have objected to small group activities of students engaging in what educators call "values clarification," with some parents suspecting that teachers may "secularize" their sons and daughters at the very age when religious and moral indoctrination becomes most intense. The New Testament, we recall, depicts Jesus at the age of 12 years debating with the rabbis in the temple. Is this an age of questioning and of new conceptualization, or is it an age of consolidation of consciousness about the beliefs already internalized?

Where parents and teachers are less reactive about middle school practices, they are still – or so it seemed to us – investing in a cultural consensus about the way early adolescence is "supposed to be." As a result, the daily program of middle schools, busy as it always is, stresses social compliance, group drill, and major amounts of time on the tasks of the three R's plus a content-centered study of science. Activity-based and hands-on learning projects are still a very small part of the thirty hour week. Group teaching in classes of twenty-five students seated at desks, working on learning a few new concepts while reviewing old ones and exercising cognitive skills, continues to dominate the school day.

Neither the task content nor the prevalent forms of instruction appear to work strategically with the powerful motivational and perceptual changes the students are undergoing. This does not spring from a poverty of ideas in the middle school literature, which has lifted the ceilings on how to work with young adolescents. It *may* stem instead from the double paradox that the adult culture has not yet incorporated a changed view of early adolescence on the one side and has not clarified the traditional view of itself on the other.

Conclusion

Critics of middle schools who suggest that the concept is little more than a new label on the old schoolhouse door may have a point when it comes to current practices in many middle schools in America. But they are in error if their point is applied to the middle school design features themselves. These represent a concerted, dynamic improvement over the K–8 and the junior high designs available before the 1960s. Goals and aims have been restated, curricular materials and approaches have been revitalized and strengthened, and above all, the middle school designers have advanced substantially the state of the art of organizing staff, time, facilities, and programs in the service of early adolescent learners.

The design transformation is so profound and yet so fungible that it can be fitted into any prevailing arrangement. It can be put to good use in K–8 schools, junior high schools, or in 7–12 preparatory schools. It can work in a host of diverse facilities; its features can be stripped down to basics or built up to luxury models or anything in between. The fact that many public school districts adopt the basic model and then *minimize* related changes from local tradition is part of the flexibility of the design and should not be interpreted as a flaw.

The features sometimes tend to outdistance the knowledge base about developmental stages, and the rhetoric about philosophy often seems to promise more than a teaching staff can reasonably be expected to deliver. These are the marketing aspects of school design ideas in this country, however, and designers unwilling to advocate will be rewarded by neglect.

What we have found among the advocates is great sincerity of purpose, ingenuity in experimentation, and associations whose members have persuaded local decision makers to adopt at least the basic design. Why this leads to less than optimal outcomes in reforming the delivery of educational services in many districts is treated in other chapters of this report. There are some flaws in the middle school designs, but they are quite minor compared to the shortcoming of slippages that develop during decision making, planning, and implementation.

3

Forces Influencing Middle Grade Reorganization

Introduction

The difference between the literature on middle schools and the community stories we collected was most striking in one respect. The literature is preoccupied with the teaching and learning environment for early adolescents, with what we described before as "design solutions." (For example, see Lipsitz, 1981; Thornburg, 1981; Sproat, 1981; Clark and Clark, 1981.) School board members, parents, and district central office administrators are familiar with parts of that literature, which has been fairly well disseminated; but they do not *explain* their decision to convert to middle schools in those terms. Instead, they explain the forces they think are working on their school systems that impel changes.

Grade reorganization around middle schools has become an exceptionally attractive option fitted to a very wide range of constituency needs and interests. It has for many decision makers the appeal we associate with a Swiss Army knife: it promises to serve a variety of purposes at relatively low cost. Indeed, in our communities, the "middle school concept," as so many people termed it, seems to have become a "solution in search of problems." Thus, at our sites and others, middle schools may have come up as an idea for desegregation, for managing declining enrollments, and for optimizing the use of physical facilities. They were *then* defined as an opportunity to upgrade instruction, innovate in curriculum plans and materials, retrain or redeploy staff, increase administrative efficiency, improve discipline, increase citizen participation, and introduce evaluation or accountability procedures.

Desegregation

In the first decade after the *Brown* decision of 1954, changes in state laws and court orders to desegregate were concentrated overwhelmingly in the South, from Maryland to Texas, and from South Carolina to Mississippi and Louisiana. The desegregative requirements there forced racially dual systems to unify in ways that involved closing some facilities and enlarging others. Students and staff were consolidated and redistributed, but in most other respects the structures and traditions of systems were, for the short term at least, left intact.

The more de facto arrangements in many northern systems did not get concerted attention until after 1964. In these, grade restructuring became an early tool for

reducing racial isolation and remedying what some state boards and legislatures came to call "racial imbalance." Restructuring also reduced the coercive and mandatory assignment imperatives that came rapidly to be dubbed "forced busing." In New York in 1964, for example, State Education Commissioner James Allen had a panel of advisors prepare a plan for desegregating the public schools of New York City. The New York City Board of Education adopted some of the proposals and evaded others.

One of the proposals that was adopted and later implemented was for intermediate or middle schools at the 6–8 grade level. A few had already been built with state funding and they seemed very promising. They pulled sixth graders out of racially isolated elementary schools and consolidated them in new facilities located near junctures of white, black, and Hispanic neighborhoods. They required moving ninth graders out of segregated junior highs and into senior high schools that previously hosted only tenth through twelfth graders. Thus, grade reorganization worked to modify racial/ethnic compositions in schools at three levels. New York City was not the first place to try this approach, but it was the largest and its changeover was widely advertised and discussed.

Responding to forces requiring racial equity was a major though not a sole source of action in three of our districts, representing seven of our twelve middle schools. In Oz City, for example, the court had ordered desegregation in the mid-1950s. The court plan preserved the K–6, 7–9, 10–12 grade structure, however, and by 1975 the system had become resegregated. It faced a new court battle and directives from the U.S. Office of Civil Rights as well. Part of the resegregation was exacerbated by declining enrollments caused by annual birth declines from 1968 to 1975.

The Oz City board adopted the "middle out" strategy in 1976. It decided to change from the old grade groupings to a K–6, 7–8, 9–12 model; to close five of its nine junior highs; and to consolidate all 7–8 graders into four middle schools. Controversies flared so intensely over the new desegregation plan that the changeover to middle schools was introduced piecemeal and carefully across a period of five years. Even the new nameplates on the four former junior highs were not unveiled until September 1980.

An alternative proposal to close one of Oz City's three high schools fueled the controversy rather than dampened it, because the adults in this city form strong alumni contingents. A third proposal to create a single consolidated junior high similarly generated pockets of reactive protest. "Middling out" became an ideally fitted solution. Plans were laid to close the racially most isolated junior high buildings along with others in white neighborhoods, and the basis for a remedy sprang into view.

* * * * *

The eastern city of Great Port *has been a biracial settlement for more than 200 years. Today, it is 52 percent white and contains the vestiges of dual, separate, black and white social structures, bottom-heavy with very low income families from both racial groups. Suburbanization from 1947 to 1982 has moved at a pace that will produce a majority black city by 1985. Great Port has retained its magnetic hold on black middle and upper class families from whose ranks it draws many of its leaders, but since 1950 the racially mixed neighborhoods that once spanned Great Port have faded away.*

Great Port Public Schools (GPPS) desegregated in 1958, but with white outmovement to the suburbs and with the competition of a very large parochial school system, GPPS today is 78 percent black. The Office for Civil Rights directed GPPS to desegregate in 1973 and monitored efforts to do so at least until 1981. Court disputes continued through 1976, and while policy outcomes were never made decisive, the pressure to desegregate "when and wherever feasible" was intense.

GPPS is proud of its ability to plan, and Great Port is in fact one of the nation's best planned and most comprehensively redeveloped big cities. As part of long range urban renewal, therefore, GPPS borrowed the middle school concept from some surrounding districts and began to fit middle schools into plans for new apartment and commercial complexes.

At the same time, white parents at one elementary school and black parents at another began to organize and lobby for middle schools. They wanted to avoid two 7–9 junior highs which were suffering from a collapse in discipline and academic programs alike. Each parent group contained a member of the GPPS board of education. Through them, and in times when dollars were not yet scarce, the parent groups proposed a plan to renovate and re-equip their elementary facilities, to "handpick" middle school principals and teachers, and to achieve improvements in student racial mixes at the same time. Under the aegis of a newly appointed black superintendent, these plans were adopted.

Within four years, the popularity of this approach had begun to spread. In one nearly all-white, affluent neighborhood, parents banded together to propose that GPPS acquire a private academy that was going out of business and turn it into a middle school for their children. Both the mayor and the superintendent rejected this proposal, but they promised a compromise. Within a year they began planning to convert a nearby, 90 percent black junior high into a middle school of the kind the parents had urged. The plant was excellent but the junior high had acquired a reputation as a "wild place" with misconduct and poor teaching. Similar proposals began to crop up elsewhere in Great Port just when the urban renewal sites were opened for middle school use.

Great Port's superintendent explained the development this way: the middle schools could be at least moderately desegregated, with reduced enrollments, higher retention of whites, and improved reputations grounded in biracial community support. The formula has been so popular, he reported, that "now everyone in Great Port wants middle schools, just when we can't afford the conversions."

Several of the schools in our study achieved desegregation aims. In particular, the Jacob Middle School in Oz City and the Burns East Middle School not only were able to overcome the problem of de facto segregation, but also managed to merge highly hostile ethnic groups into relatively cohesive student bodies.

The strategy in establishing Jacob Middle School was particularly effective. This newly built school for grades 7–9 is located in the poorer section of Oz City and serves three distinct neighborhoods – one made up of white blue-collar workers, another inhabited by poor blacks, and the third made up of unskilled Mexican Americans. Not surprisingly, relations among the three groups were strained by strong feelings of suspicion, and "turf battles" were common. Prior to establishing the Jacob Middle School, three junior high schools (grades 7–9) served this part of town. Only one was predominantly minority. The former principal of one of the schools became principal at Jacob. One of his big challenges was to integrate pupils from the three different communities, in which historic rivalries had often led to trouble. The principal spent a lot of time before the school opened, talking to parents to smooth the entry. Other tactics included providing a Jacob Middle School T-shirt for every student and working hard to get a subsidy for special physical education uniforms, both aimed at instilling a group identity. The principal reported that the mix "clicked" by the second day, and the few "gangbusters" who tried to stir up trouble were controlled within a month.

> *Burns East Middle School was established by performing minimal renovation on an average size K-8 elementary school in a predominantly Spanish-speaking section of a blue-collar New England city. The school traditionally had the poorest academic reputation in the city, and parents from other neighborhoods were reluctant to send their children to the old elementary building, regardless of school system claims of a completely revamped program. However, by redrawing attendance zones, the middle grade children who would have all attended Burns East were divided between Burns East and a second new middle school, Burns West, a short bus ride away. A substantially different staff and administration were assigned to Burns East and the school's name changed to signify a completely new institution with a new program. Though parents were initially skeptical of the new school, heavy promotional work by the principal, a bilingual assistant principal, and a very pro-middle school superintendent convinced them to take a chance. The new student body closely reflects the ethnic composition of the larger community, and the melding together has occurred without unpleasant incidents.*

In the cases of Jacob and Burns East middle schools, the lesson seems to lie in the importance of establishing a new and different identity for the school, in which none of the factions to be integrated can assert possession of the new turf. Feelings of school spirit and pride then seem to develop naturally before ethnic or class identities can assert themselves in the new school. (For more information on desegregation and middle schools, see Rosenfeld et al., 1981; Saint Louis Public Schools, 1981; Damico et al., 1981.)

When taken together our districts disclose the many ways in which racial or ethnic desegregation goals invite the adoption of the middle school concept. Middle grade reorganization can achieve far more than a statistical balancing of student proportions, although that is important, too. Adoption of the middle school concept can help to ameliorate disputes over which school facilities to close, especially insofar as high schools create strong alumni bonds or elementary schools are targets of intense neighborhood interest. Adoption of the middle school concept can upgrade a school's reputation, making it more magnetic and retentive of all population groups in the community. The more childlike student body and firm but unobtrusive controls over disciplinary problems can restore public confidence at a time when interracial fears may be intensifying. Locating the middle school on comparatively neutral ground can promote intergroup harmony. In many ways, then, the middle school concept is an attractive option for the achievement of desegregation aims.

Managing Enrollment Decline and Retrenchment

Faced with the prospect of long-term decline in enrollments and revenues, school districts generally consider a predictable set of approaches to retrenchment. Closing one or more facilities is almost invariably proposed, and neighborhood outcry is just as certain to occur. An important part of the problem seems to be that the decline occurs against a backdrop of twenty years of expansion of facilities, staff, and programs. Developing a strategy for coping with the decline is complicated by concurrent and rapid changes in levels and sources of fiscal support and in the household structure and occupational mix of the public schools' constituencies. Growing taxpayer dissatisfaction and rising parental expectations about the delivery

of educational services make retrenchment decisions especially difficult. In many districts decline comes in the middle of major readjustments to racial and ethnic composition of student bodies; in the midst of desegregation and the expansion of compensatory and other special programs, these districts are especially vulnerable to declining financial resources.

The impacts of decline may first appear as changes in class size and teacher/pupil ratios; these are followed closely by school closings and further reductions in the teaching force. Soon the pressures mount to reduce administrative staff and cut special services and programs. Even while special services and programs in some areas are being cut, legislatively mandated programs in other areas must be implemented. Similarly, the reductions in teaching staff may excite tensions between issues of equity and affirmative action on the one hand and union emphases on seniority on the other.

Faced with this complex of pressures, it is not surprising that many districts have hit upon grade reorganization as one partial solution to the design of retrenchment, and as we will see later in this chapter, there are good reasons why the middle grades are the most popular target for reorganization. Although fiscal retrenchment is always difficult, the duration of the enrollment decline and the fact that it is predictable five years in advance make it possible to do slow and careful planning of a possible solution. Hence, there should be time to involve a broad array of actors in meaningful ways.

In seven of the twelve schools in our study, long-term decline in enrollment and underutilization of facilities were identified as major issues motivating the shift to middle schools. We will briefly describe some of our cases, including two in which good use was made of the lead time, and another in which all the decision making and planning were done at the last minute, with little input from many of the affected role groups.

> *In Oz City, a 1970 enrollment projection predicted a ten year decline from approximately 26,000 to about 16,000 pupils. The central office recognized that some school buildings would be underutilized and should eventually be closed. They also recognized that by moving from a K–6, 7–9, 10–12 to a K–6, 7–8, 9–12 grade pattern, substantial additional closings and attendant savings could be realized. As the idea of reorganizing the middle grades took hold, the district administration recognized that this also provided the opportunity to revamp the very traditional junior high approach to educating the middle grades.*
>
> *Anticipating full implementation of the reorganization in the 1980–81 school year, the district established a broadly representative task force in 1976 with the responsibility for planning and implementing all aspects of the shift. Over the next several years, seven of the thirty-three elementary schools and seven of thirteen junior high schools were closed or converted to five middle schools; one new middle school was constructed; and three existing high schools were kept open but converted from 10–12 to 9–12 facilities.*
>
> *Closings and conversions occurred gradually, preceded by extensive publicity and broad involvement of affected groups – administrators, teachers, and parents – in planning. Much effort was spent to promote the improved program and to provide inservice for teachers. Resistance to closing a number of neighborhood schools was successfully defused, and implementation of the reorganization proceeded smoothly.*

* * * * *

Careful advance planning also typified the change process in Rurbanville. In 1977 Rurbanville hired a new superintendent, renowned for his ability to reorganize suburban districts. He was hired to manage a severe problem of enrollment decline – from a high of 22,500 to a low of 17,000 – but middle schools were not on the board agenda when he arrived. In September 1980 he closed eight of twenty-eight elementary schools, converted one of five junior highs into a community adult education center and the remainder into middle schools. The three high schools received all ninth graders and thus went to full capacity.

For two years before the reorganization, the superintendent organized, channelled, and educated parents about the ways in which the shift to middle schools could help solve the retrenchment problem while improving instruction in the basic skills. In the course of regular newsletters, a school census conducted by parent volunteers, and hundreds of "coffees" (the term used in town for home-based, small meetings of parents with school administrators), a powerful coalition was built between the board, the superintendent, administrators, and parents. Only the teachers' association was left out, mainly because of strife over personnel policies and suspicion about the retrenching aims of the reorganization plan.

Thus, Rurbanville mobilized to face its continuing loss of students and its anticipated, longer term shortfall in revenues. The new superintendent, already experienced with middle school implementation, built a sturdy new coalition, planned with care toward the future, put in two pilot middle programs early, and reorganized the district quite completely in four years. Assignable capacity in Rurbanville was reduced in one action by some 200 classrooms.

* * * * *

In Burns, the school board had decided as early as 1969 to convert an old high school building into a junior high and to substitute a consistent K–6 design for the existing hodgepodge of elementary grade programs. However, a new mayor later forced them to table these plans, since he would not approve a bond issue for renovating the old building. For the next eleven years, various reorganization proposals were debated, but there was never sufficient support for any of these proposals to get one passed. Finally, in 1980, a new, politically savvy superintendent was able to swing a vote in favor of a reorganization plan that called for a consistent K–5, 6–8, 9–12 organizational pattern.

By this time, district reorganization was urgently needed. The elementary program was fragmented into eleven different facilities, varying enormously in size, age, condition, and quality of programs. Due to several years of gradual but substantial enrollment decline, none of the schools was fully utilized and several had enrollments of less than 200. The new reorganization plan would close four of the smallest and oldest buildings and convert the old high school and one elementary building into middle schools for grades 6–8.

Planning for the new middle schools took place hurriedly and in an inhospitable atmosphere. In November 1980 a statewide referendum was passed to drastically reduce local property taxes. Many cities and towns, including Burns, were hit hard. Large reductions in force were inevitable. The school board decided to close the four elementary schools and open the two new middle schools all within one year. Planning involved only a handful of principals and district-level directors. The new middle school principal was not hired until December before the new schools would open, and the only teacher inservice was a two-day session late in the spring. Understandably, the teachers were unprepared and aggrieved by their exclusion from the planning process. One issue in particular, an attempt to require dual certification (e.g., math-science) for assignment to the new middle schools, led to a protracted labor dispute that nearly destroyed the chances for opening the schools the next fall.

In Oz City, Furbanville, and Burns, the problem of decline was approached through a district-wide plan of reorganization. In many big cities, however, the districts are too large to be able to mobilize their administrative talents toward any single aim, and constituencies are too numerous and divergent to tolerate the attempt. Efforts at retrenchment may go on in one sector while upgrading and extra expenditures are obligated in another. One of our districts, the Great Port Public Schools, represents this "big city" approach to the management of decline.

> *Middle schools in Great Port have been fitted gradually into a stream of other changes. From three to five buildings have been closed each year from 1977 through the present. Reductions in teachers and administrators have become annual events. The proportion of black students, meanwhile, has increased each year at a rate which overwhelms efforts to tinker with attendance zones and grade groupings. During the early and mid-1970s, the Great Port administration had achieved several successful middle school conversions across the city; schools previously perceived as threatening, danger-filled places had been closed or converted to safe, learning-centered environments.*
>
> *Despite these earlier successes, we could see that Great Port did not have the resources to invest adequately in new middle schools, with their add-on costs for modifying facilities, selecting and retraining teachers, and purchasing new equipment and materials. Success in the earlier middle schools, however, was generating demand for more of them. That demand could only be met in an ad hoc way, whenever parents in the affected neighborhoods became sufficiently influential.*
>
> *The "new" Drywater Middle School is an example of one of these schools implemented following an intensive lobbying effort by parents. Here, the contradictions were multiplying fast. Drywater was a former elementary school, and half of it was still used for grades K–3. Some renovating and equipping had been done, but not enough to make Drywater adequate for the middle school program. Staff were making do with what they had, but in the second year of the school's operations, some of the handpicked faculty had left and had been replaced by high school teachers with no experience in middle schools, no training, and no desire to be there. To cap the situation, two youths from the neighborhood, one of them expelled from Drywater the previous year, set fires in the science lab and the principal's office, causing major damage which had yet to be repaired two months after it took place.*

All of our districts were undergoing enrollment declines and all were anticipating revenue problems sooner or later during this decade. Conversion to middle schools has the powerful advantage of preserving some or, in smaller districts, all high school facilities. It also reduces the total number of elementary facilities in an evenhanded, reasonable way by seeing who will be left when sixth graders are relocated. That changeover can also be delayed for awhile to reduce confusion and resistance from parents. What is equally important is that the conversion can be achieved more or less cheaply. Our districts on the whole seemed to be making the change on the cheap, with the result that changes in quality of services were constrained. This is a source of discouragement for many teachers and it might result over time in a gradual disenchantment with the middle school concept among parents and board members. In the midst of hard times, however, it can hardly be unexpected.

Optimizing the Learning Environment for Middle Grade Pupils

We might wish that educational considerations were the primary factor motivating the shift to middle schools. Although this is not the case, it is nevertheless true that a shift planned for more pragmatic economic reasons still provides a golden opportunity for revamping the instructional program as well. In every district in our study, if educational aims were not among the primary motivations for the shift, they entered through the back door and very quickly acquired an urgent life of their own. None of our schools achieved full implementation of the more affective and philosophical components initially, but all realized at least some improvements in their instructional programs.

Advocates of middle school design believe the formality of the traditional junior high setting is totally inappropriate for middle grade students: they believe the highly personal patterns of development characteristic of this age group are done considerable violence when forced to fit the Procrustean bed of the junior high. In order to deliver the educational program to a middle grade learner, they say, there must be a wide range of educational media available. Teachers must be able to present information in a variety of ways which interest and stimulate individual pupils, and must therefore know them as individuals and be able to analyze rapidly changing pupil interests. (For a more detailed discussion of middle school teacher competencies, see Strahan, 1979.) The use of teaming, and having teachers as advisors to a relatively small number of pupils they know well, greatly facilitates this flexibility.

There is nothing inherent in junior high schools to prevent teachers functioning in these ways, but the junior high mentality of "teaching subjects" rather than "teaching kids" often seems to preclude this sort of approach. In most of the schools in our study, there was a conspicuous lack of success in converting former junior high teachers to the kind of flexibility we are discussing here, whereas former elementary teachers fell more easily into the pattern from years of experience. Thus, our schools varied in the extent to which they improved the learning environment, and the degree of improvement seems directly related to the proportion of elementary teachers on the staff. With the former junior high teachers, large doses of inservice seem to be needed, and a willingness to adhere to the middle school model is essential.

We interviewed parents and teachers as well as board members and administrators in all of our districts. Whether the conversion to middle schools had been preceded by elaborate planning as in Rurbanville, or had been implemented very gradually as in Oz City, or was being installed one school at a time on an ad hoc basis as in Great Port, there was an attenuation between the problem and the solution wherever teaching and learning were at issue. *Very, very few of those interviewed were concerned with the programmatic content of instruction.* Many offered a critique of the traditional junior high school and said they wanted something different, but nowhere did it appear that the decision to convert was predicated upon a sustained interest in changing the content or styles of instruction.

The discrepancy between the middle school literature, which focuses so intently on curriculum and pedagogy, and the forces actually said to be impelling change was quite substantial. There have long been public dialogues about elementary programs – in the case of open education, reading methods, the new mathematics, and the arts, to name just a few – just as there are always keen debates about high school programs – in English electives, guidance counseling, career education, and now microcomputer instruction. We listened to a wide range of views about middle school programs *after* they were in place, but we did not see one community where the question of *what* to teach and *how* to teach it differently was joined as a serious venture in formulating a new middle school. In Britewater, for example, the matter of putting ninth graders into the town's one high school took up ten times the meeting agenda space reserved for the middle school program per se, according to all those interviewed. This discrepancy led us to conjecture that public and professional awareness of the need for specialized early adolescent education has yet to mature.

Order and Social Control

Issues of vandalism, pupil and teacher victimization, and other, less menacing student behavior problems loom large in the nation (National Institute of Education, 1977) and were significant concerns in several of the larger school districts in our study. The junior high schools in Great Port and Oz City were described as "jungles" by parents we interviewed, and apparently with good reason. There are at least two ways in which shifting to middle schools helped alleviate such problems in our districts: first, removal of the ninth grade to the high schools was almost universally credited with major reductions in discipline problems. The macho struttings of the oldest boys, the incidence of smoking problems, and general "setting of bad examples" declined conspicuously.

A second and more powerful factor seems to be the middle school's great potential for social control, which is a source of deep concern for the authors and some of the staff we interviewed. There are two aspects to this concern. On the one hand, the student prone to discipline problems finds a reinforced control structure by virtue of the team organization of teachers. We saw that problem behavior is often the only topic discussed by teams, and questions of teaching methods are simply not addressed. Centralized team records guarantee that infractions are documented and conferences with parents are suddenly five-on-one encounters; five teachers together cannot be easily intimidated by even the most assertive parent. To be sure, this structure may truly help the pupil with nascent learning or behavior problems, but the potential for stifling individuality and creativity is also alarming. (See Propst and Nagle, 1981, and Gerardi, 1981, for more information on discipline and social control outcomes.)

On the other hand, some teachers we interviewed were concerned that the high level of control would leave these same students grossly unprepared for the relative freedom they would encounter in high school. The dilemma is not easy to resolve: at what point does control become oppressive? How do we maintain order while

gradually increasing student autonomy to facilitate growth? Discipline problems in all of our study schools were significantly reduced, but we wonder, at what cost?

Why the Middle Grades?

It is certainly possible that any or all of the district problems we have cited could be addressed through reorganization or revamping of the programs at any level – elementary, junior high, or senior high. However, there are several factors which seem to make success more likely if the focus is on the middle grades.

First, the elementary grades are generally situated in neighborhood schools dispersed throughout the community. As anyone who has ever had to propose closing a neighborhood elementary school can attest, public outcry and resistance to such actions reach incredible levels. Neighborhood schools are often critical parts of neighborhood identity, and parental participation and feelings run high. In addition, closings mean children have to go somewhere out of the neighborhood to school, and parents are reluctant to have very young children go more than a few blocks from home. Elementary grades are consequently unlikely targets for reorganization.

Second, senior high schools are poor targets for reform because they are repositories of local tradition – the town fathers graduated there, for example – and are generally bastions of conservative teaching. Even when funds are found to replace or at least renovate the most outmoded facility, the program itself is remarkably resistant to change. Senior high schools, therefore, are not good targets for reorganization.

But the middle grades are susceptible to changes for several reasons of their own. One is that junior high schools are widely disliked. They frequently have poor reputations for reasons of student victimization, availability of drugs, and assaults on teachers. The teachers are often considered misfits who were not good enough to get high school positions. (See Gruhn, 1960, for a defense of the junior high.)

Another factor lies in the nature of the middle school design. Many components of middle schools can be implemented even before a decision to reorganize. For example, team teaching, block and flexible scheduling, house plans, teachers as advisors, soft-pedalling of varsity sports and dances, and virtually any other middle school component can be – and often are – operating in a junior high or elementary school that might also be child-centered, emphasize broad learning themes, etc. Much can be done under the heading of "middle schooling" without changing the name on the building.

The number of philosophical and programmatic elements involved in the middle school design is another possible reason for the popularity of this solution to district problems. The middle school is both a configuration and a series of possibilities from which districts and schools may choose in planning and implementing schools in the middle. Middle schools are thus a tremendously flexible innovation, so that implementation of any component becomes a matter of choice and degree. They are

highly transportable and can be fitted to a variety of problems – from correcting the inadequacies of a junior high school, to managing responses to declining enrollments, to promoting equity.

Finally, there is a large and growing body of literature which provides new evidence about changes in cognition and perceptions as well as metabolism in children ages 10 to 14 (Til, 1970; Henry, 1981; James, 1981; Fenwick, 1977; Schoo, 1974). This evidence has suggested to many educators that school programs for this age group need radical revision if they are to be most conducive to learning during these years. The middle grades, then, seem to be the most fertile soil for change.

4

Making the Decision to Reorganize

In this chapter we move more directly into providing concrete suggestions on decision making and planning in the process of shifting from junior high schools to middle schools. In particular, we discuss the advantages and disadvantages of broadening the power base for decision making, including groups that should be represented in the process, steps to follow in making the decision whether or not to reorganize the middle grades, and anticipating the kinds of concerns various interested groups will raise.

Broadening the Power Base

Decision making power in schools and school districts is not necessarily a zero-sum game in which the administration "loses" any power others are permitted to wield. This is particularly true when power is dispersed among a variety of agencies or interest groups. By broadening participation in decision making to include, for instance, teachers, board members, parents, and representatives of interested or affected community groups, the administration can expand its power and impact by virtue of expanding its support groups. Broad-based decision making can defuse potential resistance as well as engender more widespread feelings of decision ownership and commitment to the new policies or programs. This can affect how well programs and policies are implemented, as well as how long they stay in place (Molitor, 1981; Louis, Rosenblum, and Molitor, 1981a and 1981b).

In many districts, the power base by tradition is highly consolidated. That is, the central district office in general (or the superintendent in particular) may call all the shots, whether on middle grade reorganization or other matters. Centralization was the case in several districts in our study, as illustrated by these vignettes:

> *In Logswood, educational decision making was traditionally left to the superintendent. Parents, teachers, and the teachers' association trusted the superintendent and respected his judgment. Faced with the problem of replacing a dilapidated junior high building, the superintendent and his elementary supervisor became interested in the middle school movement and jointly decided to design the new facility as a middle school with a middle school program; the elementary supervisor would serve as the new principal.*
>
> *An established insider in the district, the elementary supervisor was well liked and respected. He did a very presentable job of planning the implementation; however, he was not very expert in middle school design, nor was he a strong leader. Although he manifested a high degree of concern for injecting affective and philosophical elements of*

middle school design into the middle school program, he seemed doubtful that he would be able to accomplish his objective.

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In Burns, the planning was rushed and conflicted. The decision to reorganize the middle grades was made centrally, and the planning deliberately excluded teachers or parents. In fact, the principal of the two middle schools was not hired until December of the year before implementation. He was hired from outside the district, arousing much local feeling that inside applicants had been neglected. The new principal met with a planning committee that had been constituted by the superintendent and which included just six members: an elementary principal, the high school principal, and four district-level program directors. The superintendent specifically declined to include teachers on the planning committee, since he was afraid they would take what he referred to as a "unionistic" stance.

Although the new principal was well versed in the elements of middle school design, he had no planning skills at all. He never developed a formal implementation plan, and when asked about this, said "I have one in mind." Trouble was not encountered until the planning committee tried to require dual certification as a criterion for assignment to the new middle school. At this point the teachers' bargaining unit filed a grievance which went into arbitration. The grievance was resolved by backing off from the dual certification requirement, but high levels of alienation remained among many teachers. In addition, the lack of careful planning resulted in many logistical problems in the first year of operation.

* * * * *

In the midwestern community of Rurbanville, the superintendent ruled over the conversion to middle schools with an iron will. There was no aspect of the decision, planning, and implementation processes that he did not design personally or supervise with great authority. Yet, he also had an extraordinary talent for communication and public relations and thus built strong support for his reorganization plan among parents, community members, and the school board. To the outside visitor, the superintendent seemed both autocratic and gifted. To board members and parents, accustomed to twenty-three years of aloofness and traditionalism from his predecessor, he appeared exceptionally inclusive and democratic.

The superintendent also tried his public relations skill on teachers, inviting each building to elect a representative to a district committee on reorganization and also meeting with randomly selected teaching staff about twice each month. However, the teachers' association was never offically contacted regarding the reorganization, and its leadership was very embittered by its exclusion from the decision process. The teachers' chief complaint was that the reorganization had taken place too soon and that the new middle schools were overcrowded. In the two schools where crowding was most severe, a majority of teachers felt that learning conditions were poorer than they had been before the change.

* * * * *

In Oz City, the decision to shift to middle schools as part of a response to declining enrollments was centralized in the district offices. Building principals were not even consulted before the decision was made. However, when the Middle School Task Force was mobilized in 1976, inputs into the planning were broadly based. An important participant in the planning activities was the district's new Middle School Coordinator, who was well versed in middle school design and a highly skilled implementation planner. Six middle schools were established over the next five years, and the Middle School Coordinator became principal in one of these schools.

The district administration in Oz City traditionally makes decisions centrally, but leaves matters of implementation to building principals. The principals not only have considerable leeway as long as they implement the basics of the central decision, but they also

are explicitly encouraged to tailor the district programs to meet the needs of their own diverse attendance zones. Implementation has proceeded smoothly, with only minor voices raised in opposition to including some of the affective aspects of middle school design and to deletion of interscholastic athletics.

In the districts of Logswood, Burns, and Rurbanville, decision making was not participatory by any stretch of the imagination, and yet implementation was accomplished. Nevertheless, while most of the schools from these districts achieved major improvements in their programs for middle grade education, in no instance was the result something we would call a true middle school by the time our study ended. Only in Oz City, where the Middle School Coordinator became principal, did we see a school that approximated the middle school ideal. The Middle School Coordinator in Oz City had three characteristics which we believe are critical to the success of a centralized power structure attempting to shift to middle schools: first, she had a great deal of competence in the area of designing a middle school program; second, she was well-organized and meticulous in planning for implementation; and, third, she was to become principal of one of the middle schools.

The Logswood and Burns administrations were certainly benevolent in their intentions vis a vis their new middle school programs, but in both cases they lacked the combination of middle school design skills with good implementation planning skills in the person of the principal. Even in Oz City, only the Mandelle Middle School, under the principalship of the former Middle School Coordinator, really reflects the middle school concept. The other schools in Oz City that participated in our study were Jacob and Bowlers. Again, both of these achieved significant improvements in the learning environment of early adolescent pupils, but Jacob is clearly a junior high with a different name on the building, while Bowlers represents a compromise, with only rudimentary implementation of the affective components of middle schools. The Jacob principal is a "no nonsense," "back to basics" principal with a staff he selected from teachers at the junior high Jacob replaced. He is openly skeptical of the affective aspects of middle grade instruction, and runs a tight, departmentalized ship. The Bowlers principal is committed to the middle school model, but did not seem to be a particularly strong instructional leader.

Our seven districts varied in their extent of public discussion and parent participation in decision making, but they were alike, indeed they were uniform, in their reliance upon senior administrators in the central office, most often the superintendent, for initiation and planning of the change. Principals and teachers tended to play their parts long after a decision to create middle schools had been reached. Some of them were carriers of the concept and promoted early interest in its adoption, yet even they were not directly involved in the decision process except as designated representatives of their superintendents.

We think this pattern stems from the fact that middle schools were conceived of as responses to problems superintendents do not relelgate to others: problems of segregation, declining enrollments, and fiscal setbacks. Where committees were formed and when power was shared, it was not to deal with these problems but to sketch in the actionable program elements of the proposed conversions. As a result, the decision process was closely controlled and narrowly managed in nearly every district,

leaving *educational* concerns to take a back seat. The narrowness became reflected later in the shallowness of the changes in teaching and learning. However, we might also say that educational improvement was not the goal but came through to a limited extent anyway.

An Alternative Approach

As the chairperson of the Britewater school committee put it, "Nothing about the middle school *program* concept excited public concern from start to finish. The standing of the high school hockey team or the question of sex education is twenty times more important politically." A veteran educator in his own right, this policy maker was summing up an important point for all our districts: *decisions to introduce middle schools are easy to make.* It is their consequences for other interests, their ramifying effects, which require careful preliminary study. For example, curriculum at the high school really should be affected, and staff development should reflect changes in organization and in student-teacher relations, etc. For this reason, a district exploring the merits of the middle school idea would benefit from careful planning *prior* to making a decision. That planning cannot be limited to the middle school program or it will have little consequence later on.

We have said that a centralized decision making structure can operate successfully if it includes middle school design and implementation competencies in the person of the proposed middle school principal. However, where power can be more widely dispersed, we urge the formation of a decision making team which meets the following criteria.

First, the team should include representatives of all groups who will be affected if the district elects to make the shift to middle schools. Obvious candidates include the superintendent (or delegate), curriculum coordinator, counseling or guidance specialist, principals, teachers of basic and exploratory courses, board members, and parents. Often overlooked in our study was someone as an *official* representative of the teachers' bargaining unit. If new facilities or a bond issue are being considered, a representative of the community government should be involved.

Second, the team should be composed of people genuinely interested in issues related to middle grade education, for they face many hours of hard work. If no one is knowledgeable about middle school design, a consultant should be sought. Someone on the team should be competent in developing an implementation plan.

Third, the team should have a crystal clear understanding of its responsibility. For example, if they are to develop an enrollment projection for the next five years and develop a recommendation for optimizing the utilization of existing facilities within sixty days, this should be made clear. If they are to gather and review information on early adolescence and evaluate the current curriculum in terms of how it fits the needs of that age group, this should be part of their charge.

An important consideration here is the ability of team members to execute technical components of their task – for instance, conducting a needs assessment or

evaluating a set of curriculum guidelines. Nothing can sour an interested team quite as quickly as not knowing how to complete their task. Technical assistance and information are available from a variety of sources: other school districts, intermediate or state education agencies, colleges of education, the National Middle School Association, the Center for Early Adolescence, etc.

Fourth, the team should feel it will have real influence in the decision making rather than being mere "window dressing" for a decision already reached at a higher level. If a decision has already been made, an ex post facto simulation of a participatory process is a wasteful, alienating, and transparent exercise. If a decision has been made, then planning and implementation are the team's province and this should be made clear.

This leads us to the *fifth* important characteristic of the team: continuity over the various stages of the change process. Think of the change process as having several phases: decision making, planning, implementation, and continuation (sometimes referred to as "incorporation" or "routinization," in which the newly implemented program is debugged and settles into routine and continuing use). Decision making and planning may be expected to take a full year, and full implementation at least another full year, perhaps two or three. Ideally, some continuity of team membership will facilitate its work, though levels of involvement and influence of specific team members or the team itself may vary over time. For example, the roles of the superintendent and board members should become less salient in later stages while the principal, teachers, and parents assume more responsibility.

Rational Decision Making Procedures

In some districts the use of a decision making (or planning) team or task force will be a new experience. Some teams may include highly interested and motivated members who have never had to make such major decisions as whether or not to completely restructure an educational program for hundreds of middle grade youngsters, weighing every conceivable cost and consideration. We urge that some training be provided, focused on group problem solving.

Many group problem solving models have been developed and may lead to equally satisfactory results, but we suggest that the following, relatively simple set of criteria will serve most districts quite well. These suggestions are specific to the decision making stage; suggested steps for *planning* a middle school program are presented in the next chapter. These criteria are also recommended even when a more centralized power structure operates.

Criteria for Sound Decision Making

1. A careful review of district problems *precedes* consideration of reorganization or other possible solutions.
2. Alternative definitions of the problem are posed and carefully considered. The definition of the problem is not just a restatement of a priori assumptions about needs or someone's pet theory.

3. Adequate evidence of the problem is obtained. This may or may not require extensive documentation or new data collection and analysis, however, any special procedures that are adopted for use in decision making (such as needs assessments or discrepancy analysis) are carried out fully and appropriately.
4. The definition of the problem is shared by all of the team or a substantial majority of those affected by the decision.
5. The definition of the problem is clear and relevant to the situation; it is *not* stated in terms of a solution. Thus, appropriate problem statements might be: "Classrooms in four elementary schools are only in use 45 percent of the time" or "The curriculum for grades 6–8 fails to provide adequate preparation in basic skills." In contrast, the following definitions of the problem are *not* acceptable: "We need to close two buildings" or "We need a new set of curriculum guidelines."
6. Reorganization as a potential solution is reviewed by the team and any available information from outside the district is examined. For example, visits might be made to other districts, consultants may be sought from local or state education agencies, evaluation reports from other districts may be reviewed, etc.
7. Various middle school program components are reviewed for relevance to the problem areas and criteria of effectiveness or suitability to the district and school are established.
8. Alternatives to reorganizing the middle grades are carefully examined; their merits and demerits are assessed according to explicit criteria. When questions arise about these alternatives, additional information is obtained, for example through consultants, site visits, etc.
9. The final decision to implement middle schools or any other solution to the problem is shared by all, or a substantial majority of those affected by the decision.
10. The solution is manageable, cost-effective, and likely to have the intended impact on the district's problem.

It is easy to make a common mistake about the change process in almost any type of organization, including schools and school districts. This mistake is the assumption that the entire decision making-planning-implementation process is *linear*: that is to say that the process proceeds in a straight line from its origin to its completion. In fact, there will almost always be some doubling back as new information comes up which calls into question the decisions made earlier.

In practice, the team will find that the decision making and planning stages overlap in important ways – that some planning occurs before the decision is reached, and that decisions may be revised as planning develops. This is not evidence that the team's work is flawed; rather, it is proceeding in a rational fashion.

Anticipating the Concerns of Interest Groups

As suggested by our proposed list of candidates for membership on the decision making (or planning) team, the shift to middle schools affects more than just ad-

ministrators and teachers. Rather, in our study we found a variety of other interest groups had concerns to express and wanted input into the reorganization process (which they may or may not have gotten). To conclude this chapter on the decision making stage, we will review some of the common concerns expressed by these different actors, and also consider some of the consequences some schools experienced when these concerns were either not sought out or were ignored. An accurate assessment of the concerns of various affected role groups is an important part of the identification of constraints which may later affect implementation.

Parents were always participants in some part of the change process in our schools, though their levels of interest varied. The *content* of their interest, however, was fairly uniform: they were concerned that the change be one that would improve their children's chances of becoming what parents want them to be. This vision varies with the subculture of the school's attendance zone. We found, for example, that in our three upper-middle income suburban and urban schools, parents wanted their children well prepared for later entry into college preparatory work at the high school level: no watering down of the science and math curricula! Keep the interscholastic athletics which can lead to scholarships! And keep the drill teams and cheerleader squads which prepare the child for the high school and college popularity contests!

Parents also shared a concern with issues of safety, convenience of location, and quality of staff. In the latter case, they wanted assurance that there would be changes in staffing and in the training that teachers receive. Surprisingly, only in Great Port, our largest city, and there only in one school of the two we studied, did parents express deep or informed interest in the innovations in educational design of the middle school.

Only a small percentage of teachers seem to have been involved in the decision making processes. At four of our twelve schools teachers were clearly participants and had at least minimal influence; at the other sites they were either only nominally involved or specifically excluded. The involved teachers tended to be those strongly committed to curricular or instructional innovation. These positively interested teachers tended to get assigned to committees and put to work, but they had only limited influence. Their participation did not become active and influential until the implementation stage. Experienced junior high teachers were generally quite reluctant to participate and some were loudly vocal in their opposition to the shift. We found only a few junior high teachers who had been supportive of the change in their home schools or districts, though many who were later assigned to teach in the middle school (often against their will) became "true believers" shortly thereafter.

Teachers' bargaining units generally tended to be disassociated from the decision process. In no instances were teachers' associations *officially* represented. In spite of the potential implications of the shift for the associations, they tended not to flex whatever muscles they had (which was highly variable) until after the decision had been made and planning underway. Even at that point they seemed to do little beyond grumbling. At Burns, however, they filed a grievance which went into arbitration, preventing teacher involvement in planning until just a few months before the new middle schools were to open.

Though there were some local variations, teachers' associations were concerned with two issues: how staff are assigned to schools, and the length and number of preparations per day. It was the issue of staff assignment which provoked the grievance in Burns, and although it was eventually resolved late in the spring preceding implementation, ill will and a feeling of teacher alienation remained. The Burns middle schools opened on schedule, but at the time of our follow-up visits were very much junior high programs with middle school names.

Participation in decision making and planning by the associations quite clearly reflects local subcultural norms. The problems in Burns developed out of deliberate exclusion of teachers and the association from the process of setting criteria for assignment to the middle schools. By contrast, in four other districts, or eight of our twelve sites, the exclusion of teachers and the association was not a problem. In Logswood, a small rural district, the association "trusts" the superintendent. In Rurbanville, the superintendent was facing a strike over wages at the time he was making the middle school decision himself, and he and the association agreed to leave the middle school question "off the table" until long after planning had begun. In Great Port no one consulted the association leaders until implementation was underway, yet the association membership did not seem greatly disturbed.

The associations, we found, were generally excluded from the process and yet might have provided much useful input, even if just to resolve contractual issues. These include such concerns as length of school day, number of preparations, inservice, non-classroom duties, selection/retention of staff, etc., all of which arose as at least minor sources of friction at one or another of our sites. How much less tension there might have been in Burns if the decision making had been only a little more inclusive!

Other members of the local communities do not appear to have had any bearing or influence on the process, except members of the school board, of course. The one exception was in Burns where power relations are fractious as a rule, and where the mayor fought the shift tooth-and-nail. The reason was simple: he wanted to convert the old high school to condominiums, while the board wanted to renovate it for use as one of the new middle schools. The mayor could not dispose of a school building without the board's approval, and the board could not get a bond issue to raise money for renovations without the mayor's approval. The board finally managed to raise the necessary funds for piecemeal renovations from their operating budget, and the middle schools were opened more than a decade after the initial decision was made.

There were sites (Oz City and Rurbanville) where "teachers as advisors" and "values clarification" aspects of middle school programs have been stamped out by the Moral Majority. In Oz City, in fact, there is a small group of educators and parents organized to speak publicly against the Moral Majority on behalf of the school system. Patrons in these two districts were also concerned with preserving sports competition. These do not appear to be widespread concerns, however. Indeed, they did not appear at all in our other five districts.

Discussion and Conclusions

Thus far, we suggest that there is nothing unique or strange about reaching the decision to shift to middle schools. The idea seems to come up frequently when collective efforts at school problem solving are in motion. For example, Great Port was a city already surrounded by 400 suburban and rural middle schools when the idea of shifting was brought up by parents. The Rurbanville superintendent arrived from a district eighty miles away, where he was renowned for having "pioneered" middle schools. In Logswood, the state official called in to consult with the district on what to do about a dilapidated junior high school building brought the idea along as part of his standard "bag of tricks" for dealing with district problems.

The middle school decision process is also not peculiar to the topic, and those involved in making the decision should expect the process to move along as decision making generally does in their own local setting. However, if that setting is experiencing major demographic and economic change, or if power relations are generally strained and contentious, then they may safely expect that power relations in decision making and planning for the new middle schools will also lead to conflict.

In his review of "the difficulties that plague the middle school movement," Arnold (1982) writes, "the most significant shortcoming of this approach to change is that is ignores the need for support from teachers and parents. Programs will work only if teachers and parents believe in them. Surely the experience of the past twenty years with abortive innovations makes it abundantly clear that substantive change cannot be brought about by administrative fiat."

Our study supports Arnold's comment, but it goes beyond it, we think, to point out ways in which decision making about middle grades gets suspended somewhere between ideas about administrative adaptations to external forces and ideas about curricular programming. The middle school movement has been effective in amplifying ideas about programming, while most superintendents specialize in administrative decisions. What is missing is fully representative, mandated preplanning of the kind that would help to integrate the two realms.

Once said, the reasons for the discrepancy leap from the pages of our field reports. Almost no senior high educators we interviewed were resonant to the issue of middle schools beyond a concern about ninth graders. Among elementary staff, only the upper grade teachers and very few principals expressed an interest. Some sixth grade teachers were among the best informed and most proactive planners we met anywhere, but their numbers were small. The middle school movement, as Arnold notes, has tended to alienate junior high staffs and we could see why. Finally, within most central offices there were very few administrators with pertinent experience.

We went deeper than this into our interviews and realized that there *are extremely divergent cultural assumptions* about early adolescents which underlie the dialogue

in every community. The youth projected by the literature on middle schools resembles only one of the culturally desired models latent in the remarks of parents and teachers. As Sarason (1971) has pointed out, moreover, "Many teachers have two theories: *one that applies to them and one that applies to children*... Classroom learning is primarily determined by teachers' perceived differences between children and adults, a fact that makes recognition of commonalities almost impossible" (p. 182). When the child is an early adolescent, the recognition seems to grow even more impossible.

For this reason, we think, adult decisions tend to shy away from deep questions. Lacking a consensus on points other than discipline and mastery of the basics, both the K–8 and the junior high legacies have enabled Americans to gloss over the middle years of childhood. One kept them childlike, the other pressed them toward adolescence. The middle school promises to do something very different but the dialogue about it is hampered in two ways: the scope of adult interest is small on the surface and conflictual at its deeper level. We do not even seem to remember accurately what we were like and what we yearned for when we were 12 years of age. Or, more likely, we do remember but we do not want to tell.

5
Planning for Implementation

In the previous chapter we discussed the value of using a task force or decision making team, representing the various groups interested in or affected by a reorganization of the middle grades. The use of a representative team for planning the change is even more important than a team for making the original decision. Planning should not only reflect the realities of available resources but must also continue to build feelings of ownership of the program among the staff who will carry it out on a daily basis.

When Planning Is a Solo Flight

As we discussed in the previous chapter, there are circumstances under which a highly centralized decision making structure can function effectively. This happened at several of our school districts, though our data suggest that implementation outcomes depend heavily on having design and planning skills to support the decision. Moreover, as the reorganization process moves into the stage of serious planning for implementation, it seems unlikely that one or two decision makers in the average district will have the necessary knowledge of substance, methodology, and resources to plan adequately. It is virtually guaranteed that they will not build a sufficient level of commitment among staff to ensure faithful implementation.

A few of the principals in our study tried to "go it alone," with poor results. Let us consider one of these examples before we present a set of criteria and steps for the planning stage.

> *In Britewater, an affluent community only a few miles from Burns, the planning process oscillated between broad participation and centralization. The chief planner was the principal of the junior high which was to be converted to a middle school. A knowledgeable middle school advocate, he had been recruited four years prior to implementation in order to spearhead the shift. He prepared a slide-and-tape "road-show" which was shown to staff at all the different schools in the district to generate support and to recruit interested teachers to serve on the planning team. The process of developing the new program was participatory at the junior high to some extent, though some teachers felt they were being led or manipulated into making the decisions the principal wanted them to make. Extensive inservice training was provided to acquaint the junior high teachers with middle school concepts and philosophy so they could participate meaningfully in the planning.*
>
> *The sixth grade teachers in the district were invited to attend the inservice at the junior high, since that was where it was given. Feeling they had much to contribute, they were*

affronted by not having at least some of the training in their own schools. Angered and uncertain whether they would have jobs the next year because of massive riffing underway, the sixth grade teachers stayed away from the inservice workshops. The principal, annoyed at the sixth grade teachers' boycott of his inservice program, did not recruit them for his planning team "...since they hadn't had the training," thereby increasing their resentment. Grumbling was loud and open. All this notwithstanding, planning moved ahead at the junior high.

A snag was encountered when the feeling developed among many parents in Britewater that the high school was not ready for the influx of ninth graders, which some felt would cause overcrowding. This led to a one-year postponement of the conversion. Not surprisingly, the delay seriously damaged momentum and enthusiasm at the middle school-to-be, and was the source of much unhappiness. Meanwhile, the principal continued to plan his program, but meetings of the team and its subcommittees became irregular and infrequent. As the new date for implementation drew near, the team met less and less often as the principal made increasingly unilateral program and policy decisions.

The implementation year arrived just as the principal resigned for personal reasons and moved to another state. He left behind a bewildering array of problems, particularly with the badly botched master schedule he had developed. The sixth grade staff were still feeling alienated, and the seventh and eighth grade staff felt betrayed and deserted. Luckily, the superintendent stepped in to serve as a very effective acting principal until a replacement principal was found six months later to keep the new program on track.

The problems in Britewater, like others we discussed earlier, could have been avoided by making minor concessions. Having the training in middle school concepts divided between the junior high and elementary buildings would have drawn the sixth grade teachers, who had much to offer, into the planning and given them some sense of program ownership. Keeping the planning participatory would have distributed the great volume of work involved, would have had more eyes reviewing the plans and, if nothing else, might have avoided the incredible scheduling conflicts.

The principal who planned the conversion was exceptionally bright. He had an excellent grasp of middle school pedagogy and curriculum and he enjoyed the strong support of a gifted superintendent. For all of this, he had limitations and he lacked the wisdom to seek out others to offset these. He was a poor school schedule designer while many others could do this well. He had little or no feel for industrial arts, yet he did not draw on a very distinguished teacher from this unit who had pioneered in a middle school conversion experiment a decade earlier. Above all, he did not plan with and through others. Almost a year after his departure, there were still scheduling problems and pockets of disillusioned faculty.

Steps in the Planning Process

We remind our readers that, in practice, *the planning stage may overlap the decision making stage.* As some of the suggested planning steps are executed and reviewed, it may be necessary to rethink earlier decisions in the light of new information. This is part of the rational decision making and planning process and is not a reflection on the quality of earlier activities. The following criteria and steps for planning the implementation of a new program we think will be helpful in most districts.

Criteria for Sound Planning

1. There must be a realistic assessment of all possible constraints on the implementation of each component of the new middle school program. The team should carefully review each of the following (some of which may be totally restructured) as potential sources of constraints for each middle school component:
   a. *curriculum* for the elementary, middle, and high school levels;
   b. *instructional materials* to be used at each level;
   c. *instructional methods* in use or to be used;
   d. *staffing patterns*;
   e. *inservice training programs*, including sources of training, credits, funding, scheduling, and locations;
   f. *administration and governance* at the building and district levels;
   g. *availability and use of time, space, and facilities*;
   h. *guidance and counseling services*;
   i. *community relations and parent involvement*;
   j. *program monitoring and evaluation*.
2. Administrative and staff support for implementation are developed. (*Active* support from the principal is critically important.)
3. There should be a *formal written* implementation plan to specify:
   a. *leadership, staffing, and responsibility of the implementation team*;
   b. any *field trials or pilot testing* of middle school components;
   c. *resource needs* for each component of the middle school program (money, materials, equipment, staff);
   d. *scheduling* of special middle school features, such as activity periods, advisor bases, etc.;
   e. *training or staff development* (including training for administrators);
   f. *feedback and evaluation* data collection and reporting;
   g. *public relations* with the community, including planned communication methods.
4. Possible outside consultants or other human resources of value for each middle school component should be identified and brought in as needed.
5. Measures must be taken to ensure that the components of the new program retain their essential features and goals in the course of implementation. (For example, we found that although teachers-as-advisors was part of the planned middle school program at many of our schools, the teachers used the advisor base times essentially as homeroom or activity periods instead.)
6. Adaptations made to the components prior to implementation should be appropriate, judged according to whether the adaptation responds to:
   a. an obvious defect in the component, such as missing instructional materials or equipment;

b. genuine local needs of staff or students (*not* needs which are simply easier to treat or which are symptomatic of something else);

c. unalterable constraints in the situation, which are dealt with in such a way as to avoid subverting the goals or philosophy of the program or its components;

d. special opportunities or leverages in the situation that allow for enhancement of the program or component's effect.

7. The level of effort expended on planning for implementation should be appropriate to a major change program. That is, it takes a *great* deal of work to do an adequate job of planning a major restructuring of the educational program for early adolescent students.

8. Each element of the plan for each middle school component is reexamined to see how it fits the special needs of students in this age group. It is very easy for the needs of the students to get lost in the shuffle of curriculum planning, scheduling, attendance zones, and bus routes.

The Planning We Saw

Only one of our seven districts, Rurbanville, achieved anything approximating our criteria for sound planning. There, planning was not only well done, it also became the means for building a strong coalition between the board, administration, and parents, and between the new superintendent and his administrative cabinet. Not a single element of the district and not one of our criteria was overlooked. There was one great paradoxical flaw in the Rurbanville planning process, however: the leadership of the teachers' association was left out as a spillover from severe conflicts over wages and benefits which left both groups angry at each other.

It was no surprise to anyone, then, that these teachers became severe critics of both the plan and its implementation. At least a third of the association's executive committee members were teachers at one of the newly converted, former junior high schools. Their estrangement will delay maturation of that particular school for some years to come.

Most of our districts considered planning to be a matter of developing a statement of philosophy about middle schools, its elements drawn from texts and consulting advocates, and following that statement with practical arrangements for staffing, scheduling, renovations, and transportation. Only Great Port built some provision for evaluation into its planning and that was because the evaluation unit of the district was developing a proficiency testing program anyway.

Contrary to the recommendations of middle school advocates everywhere, none of our districts actually planned their programs solely on the basis of fitting programs to the needs and interests of pre- and early adolescents, although goal statements from planning teams often cited the importance of this dimension. For instance, the merits of ungraded approaches were part of the readings and advanced consultations our districts took under consideration, yet with the exception of classes for

students with severe special needs, none drew up plans to try *mixed-age* grouping. As Arnold (1982) noted in his review of middle school implementation, "Developmental findings do not lend a shred of support to grouping students by age, yet same-age grouping is practiced virtually everywhere" (p. 454). Nor did planning in any of our districts extend to the matter of *curricular integration*, although during implementation some teams of teachers began to develop shared lessons across their disciplines.

It is in the planning stage, then, that we could see the sources of slippage between the advocates' design and the aims of our districts. There were very few elements of the design that were planned for adoption and these were nearly universal across our sample: the ideal of grouping grades 6–8; the principle of creating teams of five or six teachers to take responsibility for academic instruction of a same-age, single-grade group of from 100 to 120 students; exploratory courses in the other subject and skill areas; and activity periods.

Interpreting this as a matter of slippage is a tricky matter, however. It is just as plausible to say, for instance, that districts tend to shop around like consumers. They inspect the middle school design list and pick from it the features they regard as basic. The resulting plan is then legitimated on the premise that it does not depart greatly from the local status quo. In contrast, the design options of an integrated core curriculum, team teaching, ungraded or mixed-age grouping, values clarification, teachers-as-advisors, and lots of hands-on learning, are perceived as risky options that carry controversies in their wake.

Taking an optimistic view, one might suppose that school administrators are interested in a long-term gradual movement toward the middle school ideal and are simply biding their time and downplaying the more controversial aspects of middle school design until the spotlight is off the new schools. Frankly, we can imagine that this was the case in only one or two of the schools we visited, and never at the district level. We met several principals who seemed to have a vision of creating a school according to the tenets of the middle school design advocates. Two of these principals were obviously very poor planners, and we seriously doubt that they failed to put together implementation plans simply because they were keeping controversial ideas to themselves. The other principals with advanced ideas about middle schools generally involved their faculty and in some cases parents in planning, so that a constituency for the middle school concepts was developed through the planning process. In these schools, we think that the design options of integrated, cross-disciplinary teaching, activity-based instruction, and true team planning may well be implemented within the next several years. However, even in these schools, it appeared that ungraded groupings, teachers-as-advisors, and values clarification were concepts too radical for the local communities ever to accept.

The Importance of Communication Procedures

In all of our districts there was wide publicity about the planning process and the proposed change. Change intentions were disseminated at length via the press, television, open board meetings, newsletters to parents, inserted tabloids in local

papers, special meetings called by PTAs, and informal "chats" staged by superintendents and principals. For example, in Rurbanville the superintendent staged over 100 "coffees" to generate support for the shift to middle schools; in Britewater the school district kept the public informed through a regular four-page insert in the local weekly paper.

How these communications affect decision making and planning depends on the historical level of consent or dissent in each community, and this should be considered in selecting the vehicles for communication and the actual content. The effects may either consolidate the plan as policy or trigger new disputes – a range of possibilities which does not seem to be dependent on particulars of the middle school plan. For example, in Oz City the proposed deletion of interscholastic athletics elicited a storm of angry protest which dominated several public meetings. Finally, at one of these meetings the assistant superintendent for instruction stood up and loudly asked, "Doesn't anyone want to hear about the educational program we have for these kids?" Meanwhile, proposed closings of elementary and junior high schools and the construction of a new multi-million dollar middle school building caused relatively little concern. In Britewater the loudest cries of concern dealt with whether the high school would have an open campus after the shift; components of the middle school design evoked very little comment.

The publicity campaign plans we saw made little advance provision for the treatment of these tangential issues that were likely to trigger community dismay. The issues were usually well known to teachers and principals, however, and with more concerted canvassing they could have been factored in and treated more intelligently. The "coffees" in Rurbanville flushed out tangential issues quite quickly, and the second fifty coffees went more smoothly than the first fifty as a result. That approach leaves something to be desired in terms of cost/benefit ratios, however, when it consumes the energies of senior administrators for many months.

As mentioned earlier, the middle school plans publicized by district offices tended to concentrate on the many *uncontroversial* features, such as child-centeredness, block scheduling, teaming, intramural games, learning projects, and the ostensibly benign expansion of control over behavior – features which do not threaten local values. The more profound and complex – hence, more emotionally loaded – educational and counseling features were rarely stressed or elaborated. Further, care was generally taken to ensure that the plan was presented as one which had been formulated to best fit with local interests and concerns and was, therefore, homemade.

This highlights a topic discussed earlier in this report: assessing the concerns of interest groups. We suggest that in the meetings of the planning team, a large matrix be drawn with columns representing each middle school component being considered, and rows representing the interest groups in the school district and the larger community. The team should then determine and discuss and note the potential concerns of each interest group relative to each component in the appropriate cells of the matrix. Communication procedures can then be focused so as to address these concerns and develop support, either through assurance or cooptation. For example, careful preparation of such a matrix of concerns could identify sources of

important additional inputs into the planning process. Information can be targetted to specific groups to arouse their interest, potential sources of resistance can be defused, and the entire change process can proceed far more smoothly.

One possible negative consequence of extensive communication of the plans may occur when implementation finally takes place. A well publicized, detailed plan is almost bound to raise concerns *later* as various interest groups note differences between plan and reality during the first few months of implementation. Furthermore, where the planning is detailed but did not include teachers, then these teachers and the leaders of their bargaining units have their targets of complaint set up in full view.

Formalizing the Implementation Plan to Support Evaluation

We have suggested above that the implementation plan should be formal and written. There are several reasons for this. *First*, a formal plan, properly written and formatted, will clarify administration's expectations of staff. *Second*, it will force a realistic assessment of constraints on implementation. For these reasons we suggest that the planning for each aspect of the implementation process identify tasks in behavioral terms, specify the individuals responsible for their completion, appropriately delegate leadership for each task, establish times for completion, and specify the acceptable evidence or criteria for completion (or progress toward completion). *Third*, a written formal plan such as we have been describing provides the criteria for ongoing program monitoring and evaluation. Consequently, we further suggest that tasks in the plan be geared to expectations regarding how each middle school component to be implemented will be reflected in each facet of the educational operation, namely, curriculum, instructional materials, instructional methods, etc.

A variety of implementation designs are available and are appropriate for use in monitoring progress with the new middle school (as an example, see Alexander and George, 1981), but these are beyond the purview of this volume. We suggest that the planning team review these possible designs with some locally available resource person who can provide technical assistance, if needed.

Even where dollars are bitterly scarce and cannot be reserved for systematic, independent evaluation, a district whose board leads its public to expect student achievement or other gains to result from converting to middle schools will need to preplan how those specific gains will be observed and measured and how they will be linked to the implemented changes. At least four of our seven districts had fairly elaborate student measurement activities built in, yet even in these their planning did not show how those activities would be harnessed to the appraisal of the changeover.

It took from 1950 to 1970 for many localities to conclude that their junior high schools were not working satisfactorily. This was due in part to the absence of evaluations aimed a junior high programs over the long term. Our findings suggest

that the same pattern may prevail for middle schools: their successes and failures may go unevaluated for decades.

Discussion and Conclusions

We were concerned in our research to *describe* what districts were doing and to infer from this some practical suggestions for districts whose leaders are considering changing to middle schools. In this chapter, however, the tension between describing and prescribing became excessive. Much of the planning we observed was so slight and exacted such costs in confusion and controversy later on that we have risked becoming prescriptive in urging better planning by other districts.

The flaw in this approach is that it invites neglect of the reasons that planning in most (but not all) districts was so slight. Here we want to remedy that flaw. If the change being sought is slight, we believe this will show up in the planning process. We think this is the prevailing reason for what we found: the real tension is set up in the eye of the observer. As goals and objectives are often drawn from the literature of the middle school movement, they become quite high-sounding and prospectively far-reaching, but on closer inspection what a district has in mind is actually a minimal departure from its local tradition. Detailed, broad-based participation in planning in this instance will be unnecessary. It could also generate new controversies.

Therefore, it is most accurate to say that the local district planning we observed and reconstructed from interviews offers an indicator of the scope of the change being pursued by a school board and superintendent. Where the scope is quite small by preference, a few phrases can be borrowed from the middle school movement's advocates in order to enhance parental interest. There is nothing cynical, manipulative or even short-sighted in this course of action. It is simply a matter of employing the label and some one or two features such as team clusters and exploratory courses in order to lubricate the relocation of students and teachers.

What is more, this can occur at the central office level while at the building level a principal and a few teachers plan hard to induce greater program changes. Confusion does get stimulated, however, when school-level planning outdistances central office intentions or when publicity makes parents build up expectations that something dramatic is being scheduled. Often both kinds of confusion are little more than locally self-determined modes of adjustment.

Finally, even slight changes can improve the learning situation for students and teachers – not enough to show up on tests of gains, surely, but enough to give them both a bit of extra satisfaction. As one teacher in Rurbanville put it, "When I came to teach at this middle school, I thought I had died and gone to Heaven!" She finds that the chance to co-plan with other teachers is a great improvement in itself. Here, the advance planning helped to the extent that it provided a mechanism through which elementary teachers could ask to be assigned to a middle school or stay where they were. That mechanism alone was a source of hope for many teachers, some of whom were refreshed by the change while others enjoyed the chance to go on just as before. In the next chapter, we continue this theme of the relationship between planning and effects.

6

Implementation and Program Outcomes

Introduction

By the time the schools in our study had reached implementation we had concluded that "middle school," as a cluster of concepts, supplies a mental blueprint for a behavior setting in which staff and students transmit knowledge, skills, cultural values and role sets. The middle school philosophy says a great deal about how the setting should be shaped, how the actors should be grouped, and how they should treat each other. But at the local level, the design is not complete. Rather, it gets fitted to the preferences and emphases of the community considering it. This adaptability may be one of the middle school's most useful characteristics. That is, advocates, decision makers, planners, and implementors are able to interpret the idea of the middle school so as to be congruent with their own values.

We found that many features of the "ideal" middle school were ignored almost completely at most of our sites. Not only were these features missing in most of the schools that we visited, there seemed to be no great interest in instituting them now or in the future. Particularly conspicuous by their absence were integrated core curricula, ungraded groupings, and project-based learning. Certain features – such as teachers-as-advisors and values clarification – had been expunged as threatening or otherwise undesirable in some communities. Still other features were either pumped up and enlarged or deflated and diminished in accordance with the importance attached to them by the community. This happened, for example, with intramural sports and games, recreational mixers, and student-based activity units. The variety of what was implemented at each site appears in Exhibit 2 on the following page.

The concept of the middle school did not draw as much adult attention to the uniqueness of the early adolescent as the many researchers studying this age group might like. Rather, the youth dimension was generally underemphasized or ignored nearly everywhere. Although there was some lip service paid to meeting the developmental needs of this group, the hottest issues and most frequent debate focused on *adult* concerns: effects on taxes, adequacy of physical plants, staffing, scheduling, bus routes, power relations, and desegregation.

There was also a lack of clarity about what this age group should or could learn. The light shed by the recent physiological, neurological, behavioral, and educational research has not yet penetrated to many district decision makers, though future years of trial and error in real middle schools may change this condition. Our conclusion, however, is that a middle school plan can be developed with wide par-

Exhibit 2

Site Program Characteristics

District Name (pseudonym)	School Name (pseudonym)	Basic Skills teaching teams	In-school detention	Teachers as advisors	Intramural athletics	Regular parent participation	House plan	Exploratory courses
Logswood	Logswood	5th–6th grades self-contained, other grades team	yes	no	no	no	no	yes
Burns	Burns East	yes	yes	no	yes	no	no	yes
	Burns West	yes	yes	no	yes	no	yes	yes
Britewater	Britewater	yes	yes	no	yes	no	yes	yes
Chapeau	Chapeau	yes	yes	no	yes	no	yes	yes
Great Port	Bell Highlands	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	no
	Drywater	yes	no	no	no	yes	yes	yes
Oz City	Bowlers	yes, but only social studies/ language arts	yes	yes, to some extent	yes, with inter-scholastic	no	yes	yes
	Jacob	yes, but only social studies/ language arts	yes	no	yes, with inter-scholastic	no	no	yes
	Mandelle	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	yes
Rurbanville	Northern	yes	yes	no	yes	no	yes	yes
	Old Line	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	yes

Exhibit 2 (continued)

Site Program Characteristics

District Name (pseudonym)	School Name (pseudonym)	Special interest activities	Curriculum integration	Block Scheduling	Innovative progress reports	Multi-age grouping	Values clarification	Activity-based instruction
Logswood	Logswood	yes	no	no	no	no	no	no
Burns	Burns East	yes	no	yes, but not used that way by teachers	yes	no	no	no
	Burns West	yes	no	yes, but not used that way by teachers	yes	no	no	no
Britewater	Britewater	yes	no	yes	yes	no	no	no
Chapeau	Chapeau	yes	no	yes	no	no	no	no
Great Port	Bell Highlands	no	no	no	no	no	no	no
	Drywater	no	no	no	no	no	no	no
Oz City	Bowlers	yes	no	yes	no	no	no	no
	Jacob	yes	no	no	no	no	no	yes
	Mandelle	yes	no	yes	no	no	no	no
Rurbanville	Northern	yes	no	no	no	no	no	no
	Old Line	yes	no	no	no	no	no	no

ticipation and deep contributions from experts, but can still lack much content on the early adolescent as the client. The resulting program then becomes important for what it lacks as much as for what it includes.

Another pit into which several of our sites fell was a lack of attention to the developmental nature of the middle school program itself. Although it was generally recognized that the entire implementation process could not be programmed in detail, and that a more "evolutionary" model would actually operate, only one of our twelve sites had minimally adequate feedback monitoring mechanisms set up so that needed future changes could be identified and planned for.

As with the decision making and planning stages, we suggest a few straightforward criteria for sound management of the implementation process. These are:

Criteria for Program Implementation

1. All elements of the formal implementation plan must be borne in mind and efforts made to implement them on schedule.
2. Any difficulties in implementation should be realistically assessed and efforts made to resolve them.
3. Administrative and staff support for all elements of the plan should be gained or reinforced.
4. Outside consultants or other human resources of value to the program should be brought in as needed to provide inservice, identify needs and resources, or assist in monitoring and evaluation.
5. Specific measures should be in effect to ensure that the various components implemented retain their *essential* features and goals in the course of implementation.
6. Adaptations made to the program's components after implementation should be appropriate, judged according to the same standards listed earlier under Criteria for Sound Planning.
7. An implementation team should be formally charged with overseeing the implementation process, providing a channel for feedback on implementation problems, and planning to resolve them. Ideally, this team should be the same group that did the implementation planning, or a subcommittee of that group, to maintain some continuity through the change process.
8. The implementation team should also assure that decision making, planning, and implementation of new program components or revisions to existing components remains an ongoing, dynamic process. The implementation plan may undergo continued revision, as long as such revision is consistent with the expressed aims of the middle school, and as long as each planned component is given enough time for a thorough test of its value to the middle school program.

In the remaining sections of this chapter, we review some of the more prominent sources of slippage – the failure of a program as implemented to measure up to what was planned; and we consider some of the unintended side effects of some

middle school designs, as well as how new middle school programs might be evaluated.

Potential Sources of Slippage

The criteria for implementation assume that an adequate job of planning for implementation was done, defined in terms of the criteria set forth in the previous chapter. As we stated there, a formal implementation plan is critically important for later activities, but is only one potential source of slippage in the implementation stage. We may identify at least five potential sources of the shortfall between what was expected and what was achieved in shifting to middle schools: (1) lack of a formal implementation plan; (2) lack of commitment on the part of those charged with implementing the new program; (3) inadequate inservice or staff development; (4) inappropriate adaptations of middle school program components; and (5) fiscal cutbacks.

The desirability of a formal implementation plan was discussed in some detail in the previous chapter. One of its chief advantages lies in the fact that when properly developed, it virtually forces a realistic assessment of constraints that could later affect implementation. Another important advantage is that a properly developed plan ensures that expectations will be quite clear: everyone will know who is to do what, by what time, and who is responsible for seeing each task to completion.

The *second* potential pitfall, a lack of commitment on the part of teachers and administrators charged with implementation of the new program, is guaranteed to result in unsatisfactory program outcomes. For example, at both the Burns and Britewater schools, substantial numbers of staff were still alienated in the first year of implementation, as a result of having been excluded from all or a significant part of the decision making and planning activities. During our interviews, teachers were openly critical of the program and how it had been developed at both sites. At Burns a number of tenured teachers from the high school had had to accept assignments at the middle school against their wills: due to massive reductions in force, no other positions for them were available. One English literature teacher quite candidly said that she did not want to be there, did not like the "juvenile" material she was required to teach, and did not like the childish behavior of the students at that age level.

Teachers of the exploratory courses, such as fine, applied, and performing arts or foreign languages, face special problems which may lead to alienation and lack of commitment. Almost invariably, these teachers were not included as members of the teaching teams, which removed them from the intellectual stimulation and camaraderie that the basic skills teachers at each grade level could have with each other. Furthermore, they were often not provided with the planning time allotted to the basic skills teachers, which is unfair at best. Finally, many of these teachers complained during our interviews that because they had to teach the same courses over and over each term, the material became totally boring. In those cases where several of their subjects were condensed into superficial overview courses – foreign languages were particularly vulnerable to this treatment – the teachers lamented

loudly that their subjects were getting short shrift. Complaints of "second-class citizenship" were common and justified.

Another widespread reason for lack of commitment is that the shift to middle schools frequently occurs in a context of fiscal stringency and retrenchment and is, in fact, one of the more common means for making cutbacks. Teachers clearly recognize the shift as a sign of imminent layoffs. In the Britewater and Burns districts, for example, the shift occurred in the context of huge reductions in force, statewide. Job insecurity was widespread, particularly in Burns where the incoming principal of the new middle school attempted to require dual certification for assignment to the new school and required all teachers of grades 6 through 8 to apply for positions rather than assigning them on the basis of seniority. To the teachers, this meant they had to apply for their own jobs. It is easy to imagine their alienation under those circumstances.

Lack of commitment may also be related to the *third* potential source of slippage, inadequate inservice or staff development. The middle school deals with a unique group of students, and staff need to be aware of their special qualities. Team teaching is much more than an organization of teaching staff, but many of the teachers at our schools had not received any instruction on how to go beyond sharing behavior problems with their teammates. Teachers-as-advisors involves more than serving homeroom functions, but most of the teachers we interviewed had no understanding of what their "advisor base" responsibilities should involve.

The *fourth* possible source of slippage, inappropriate adaptations of middle school components, was not observed very often in our study. There were a few worth mentioning. In Britewater, administrators attempted to preserve the ability grouping practiced previously in the junior high school and beloved by parents whose children were classified as "advanced." Three levels were maintained, with two severe side effects: (1) scheduling of teams became a nightmare as this extra variable was injected without extra staffing, and (2) the middle ability group was made so very large that some parents protested hard for upward classifications. Meanwhile, teachers who had internalized the middle school philosophy became alienated. In the Drywater Middle School in Great Port, a part of an elementary school was preserved on site, with three negative effects: (1) some students had to enter the middle school as newcomers, while others had been there all along; (2) space for teams was inadequate and the new middle program was decidedly cramped; and (3) the small elementary gym room was not adequate for carrying out the physical education program.

Most often, we found that components were simply not implemented at all – for example, the advisor base time was used as a homeroom or activity period. Other research by the senior author of this report has shown that adaptation of program components can seriously reduce program impact (Molitor, 1981; Louis, Rosenblum, and Molitor, 1981a and 1981b). The problem seems to lie in faulty decision making on what is to be implemented, without adequate assessment of constraints that can affect the school's ability to actually put the program components into operation. This results in the selection of components that then have to be adapted, either prior to or during implementation, with deleterious effects on outcomes. Hence our

earlier emphasis on careful decision making and planning of components to be implemented.

The *fifth* potential source of slippage has already been referred to in connection with lack of commitment on the part of teachers. This fifth source is the widespread fiscal cutbacks, resulting in staff reductions, unavailability of funds for the purchase of necessary materials or for needed renovations to facilities, and the inability to hire the staff needed to provide exploratory courses. This latter problem is particularly acute in small, less wealthy districts which have never had such course offerings and hence have no staff already in the district qualified to teach them.

Similarly, where middle schools are implemented as part of cutbacks, the urgent matter of "vertical articulation" gets neglected. High schools induct ninth graders as speedily as possible and then raise their drawbridges and ignore the implications for fitting their future program options to the middle school. Elementary staffs wave farewell to departing teachers and sixth graders and carry on as always. Indeed, many elementary and senior high administrators took pride when interviewed in explaining that the new middle school had left *their* programs unaffected.

Most pervasive of all is the fact that adoption of the "stripped-down" middle school basic design – the design that tends most often to come with retrenchment – fairly assures minimal impacts on student achievement and satisfaction. Missing are activity programs, field trips, career explorations, hands-on learning projects, and extensive intramural games of the kinds the more complete middle design carries with it. Then, if teachers feel left out of planning, unable to get a new job in a different district, short on supplies, and assigned with very brief retraining to a new middle school, the outcomes can be quite dismal. Nothing came home to us more dramatically during our field visits than the scope of teacher demoralization – *not* with the middle school concept, but with school teaching as a career path for the 1980s.

Cutbacks have another consequence in some districts and that is the continuation of ineffective building administrators. Districts closing schools often suffer from an excess of principals and assistant principals. As positions are redistributed, new middle schools are vulnerable to being led by tenured administrators who were ineffective before, who do not embrace the new aims, and who do not know how to manage the much greater space, time, and staffing complexities implied by the concept, even if it is the basic model.

Unanticipated Consequences

Our study revealed that the interaction between local context, decision making, planning, and implementation was such that no linear or technically rational processes or sequences seem to play themselves out. Rather, the interactions seem to adhere to a logic that only makes sense once the local cultural and symbolic patterns have been understood.

For example, the forces that apparently motivate middle grade reorganization may be declining enrollment and the need to optimize the utilization of existing facilities, but the content of the implementation plan reveals more concern with increasing discipline and control of students. Thus, in implementation, the thing to watch is not just the improved management of decline – which may not result at all – but also the license provided for unifying teacher control over the social behavior of students. Clearly, the potential of the teaming concept for generating ever more intensive and elaborate modes of social control may have a quite positive implication: increased learning time because of fewer behavior problems. However, a closely related consequence could be social labelling. In the Northern Middle School of Rurbanville, for example, one of the five-member teams kept a single file-card box with a card for each student. All five teachers made entries about problem behavior, and these entries provided the focus for team discussions. This process itself may create student deviants, particularly in a conservative district such as Rurbanville.

In large middle schools where two or more teams are composed for each grade (we found *no* instances of truly ungraded schools), tracking can be another negative consequence, one that is often ignored as a possibility by even veteran principals and teachers. For example, during our first visit to one district, the senior author was reviewing the plans for assignment of students to teaching teams with one of the principals, and pointed out that on the basis of their procedure, tracking was virtually guaranteed to occur. The principal's response was, "Uhh...yes...that could happen." When we returned for the second site visit after the school had implemented the new program, we found that the plan had been put into effect and several teachers complained that tracking was, in fact, a problem (which the principal denied).

So, too, we found that in some districts teacher teams were composed so as to reward conformity, reinforce in-groups, and punish dissenters. In Rurbanville, for example, teachers were invited to express a preference for a school and, later, to request (in two schools) appointment to a particular team. According to some teachers' union leaders, the first procedure was used by the district administration to punish or disadvantage some union loyalists. We did not succeed in verifying this and the superintendent denied it happened. He denied it with such eloquent hostility toward "those crazies who lead the union," however, that it was not hard to see how a subordinate might fulfill the unspoken wish.

Team composition is delicate however it is done. When principals do the composing, unhappy teams blame the front office. When teachers do it themselves, they sometimes stress social cliques and leave newcomers out to fend for themselves. The ideal is to co-plan what will be best for the students, but this presupposes more *trust* between principals and teachers than is often available.

Another unanticipated consequence may be unintended side effects on the cognitive development of students. Almost without exception, the plans called for at least minimal special services, enrichment and exploratory courses. Yet implementation seemed to lower the ceilings on intellectual achievement at some schools. For example, virtually all of our schools supplanted electives with exploratory courses prescribed for all students. A case in point is Rurbanville, where planning was

meticulous and elaborate – more so than in any other district – but where teachers complain that the exploratory offerings are a "shallow farce." Foreign language teachers there must now teach all seventh grade students French, German, and Spanish in three thirteen-week units; sixth graders get three weeks of instruction in each language! This raises the question of how such offerings could meet the professed goals of the middle school. In Oz City the district foreign language coordinator made a similar observation relative to the proposed offering of Chinese, which was not even offered at the high school.

Similar substantive dilution has occurred at the Drywater School in Great Port where, by the second year of operation, the best handpicked staff had transferred out and were replaced by beginners and involuntary transferees. Consequently, the more experienced and committed staff report that content has thinned and the cognitive richness of the plan has been lost. Obviously, inadequate staff development, such as occurred at Burns, can and did produce similar compromises to the integrity of the middle school ideal, with spiralling disappointment on the part of staff who really wanted it to work. There appear to be many ways in which even a careful plan, manifestly aimed at deep intellectual stimulation, can turn shallow and limiting when put into use. This again highlights the importance of careful and ongoing monitoring and evaluation, to which we now turn.

Evaluation in the New Middle School

Earlier we referred to the importance of a detailed implementation plan for program monitoring and evaluation in the new middle school, and pointed out how intimately evaluation design was related to careful planning for implementation. Although a common major purpose of evaluation in a school system is to provide information on student progress, our focus here will be on how to provide data on the attainment of middle school goals. Since goal setting in the middle school is seen as an evolutionary or developmental *process* rather than a rigid program to be followed without deviation, it is critical that a mechanism be established to provide feedback on the specific practices that make up each component of the middle school program. Only then will it be possible to assess progress, modify practices, and improve developing programs through continuing planning and, if necessary, modification.

It may be useful to think of implementation as having three phases. First, the early months (perhaps from September through December) may serve as a "shakedown cruise" in which everyone works hard to get the day-to-day functioning of the school into relatively smooth and efficient operation. Particularly when the middle school is in a new or extensively renovated facility, it may take some time for staff, faculty, and administration alike to identify and explore all the ways that time, space, and facilities can be used. For example, the tiny community of Logswood closed its rickety old junior high and constructed a beautiful new facility to house a 5–8 middle school. Although the design of the building was detailed and thoughtful, the teachers and principal were enjoying unexpected possibilities for using the space. Like many other middle school plans, the design at Logswood involved a large multipurpose space which doubled as a lunch room and assembly hall – until

a visiting musician pointed out that the acoustics in the new gym were far better than those either in the lunch/assembly room or the new band room.

It should be expected that in the first months of implementation teachers will be primarily occupied with getting used to the new organization and surroundings and with rather mechanical implementation of any new teaching concepts. In fact, if there was not enough lead time to get used to the change, or if teachers were alienated and left out of the planning process, they may still be preoccupied with personal concerns – how does this affect *me*? – rather than thinking about ways of improving the impacts on children. Researchers at the University of Texas at Austin have shown that this is the normal progression of concerns in the adoption of an innovation: as personal concerns are resolved, one becomes more concerned with day-to-day management of an innovation, and then later with ways of improving the consequences for children. (For more on this topic, see Hall et al., 1973.)

The second phase of implementation might begin after the New Year. This is the opportunity for standing back and reflecting upon what has been accomplished, where the biggest problems lie, and where the program is going. It will be a time for asking difficult questions, refining strategies, and reconsidering what makes a good middle school, good: how well are we meeting each of the diverse needs of early adolescents? To what extent have the other criteria developed during planning for implementation been achieved? We recommend that release days be planned for January, February, and perhaps March to help stimulate discussion, and we urge that team meeting time be devoted to following up, developing and assessing practical *teaching* strategies, and strengthening the cluster and team model.

The third phase might begin in late March and focus on evaluating what has been accomplished to date. This will provide a basis for planning revisions of the middle school program for the next year, perhaps through a series of *regularly scheduled* planning sessions, with *everyone required* to participate in at least one planning subcommittee of their choice. The subcommittees might focus on activities, inservice, progress reporting, curriculum, facilities utilization, or other program elements. This process can increase everyone's understanding of the complexity of even a small new middle school, identify tradeoffs to be made, and develop an even more positive view of what is to be accomplished during the second year.

We again stress the importance, during implementation, of a broadly representative decision making and planning team, with explicit and continuing responsibility for coordinating the activities which will make up these three phases.

Measuring Implementation of the Middle School Program

Regardless of whether or not a formal implementation plan was developed prior to implementation, it is still possible and desirable to measure the amount of change that has occurred at various times. If a formal implementation plan was developed along the lines suggested earlier, the dimensions for measuring implementation will

have already been defined. However, even if a school or district is implementing a middle school program without such a prior plan, the implementation team can still develop a detailed set of criteria against which to assess their progress.

The importance of measuring implementation in at least some fashion is obvious: if you don't know what happened to a group on which you have a set of outcome measures, such as attitude or performance measures, you cannot explain the observed outcomes. Pre- and post-implementation outcome measures by themselves are simply not enough since we know full well that in many (most?) cases, the program of experiences we want to occur between those measures is not carried out as anticipated. The failure of staff or administrators to carry out intended activities is as fatal to the evaluation as it is to the program. If undetected, this failure can seriously mislead those responsible for program development and continuation. (See Alexander and George, 1981, for a discussion and references on evaluation in and of a middle school.)

No matter what evaluation design is developed, there is a particular problem in measuring implementation of a middle school program or any other complex innovation: it has *numerous component parts*. That is, measuring implementation requires gathering data on a number of components – perhaps on a number of aspects of *each* of a number of components. We suggest that middle school program monitors consider the possibility of assessing the implementation of each aspect of each component in terms of the *pervasiveness* or "spread" of the change, and the *proportion of an affected unit's activity* which is altered.

Pervasiveness addresses the question of whether the implementation of the change is as widespread as desired. Assuming the implementation plan or criteria specified that, say, 100 percent of the team teachers would exhibit a particular behavior pattern, then over time the *observed* proportion of teachers actually meeting that criterion becomes a measure of program implementation. Similarly, implementation may be measurable in terms of the *proportion of a unit's activity* which is affected. For example, regardless of what proportion of the teachers are expected to exhibit a particular activity, if only forty-five minutes of the teachers' day is affected the implementation is less extensive than if the entire work day is involved. Likewise, an activity which involves, say, bringing in a member of the local Chamber of Commerce only once to talk to an economics class is less extensive than one involving a series of talks to a civics class.

The point of these suggestions is that the measurements can be "real" numbers: percentages of teachers, students, classrooms, working hours, etc., which meet some criteria. Obviously, if the measurements are taken at regular intervals over time, then trends in implementation of the various components may be identified, displayed, and examined to spot problem areas.

Another advantage of this approach to a multidimensional measuring of implementation lies in the expanded possibilities for analysis of program impact. By providing implementation data on all aspects of the new program, this approach allows more precise attribution of impacts on whatever program outcome measures (teacher attitudes, pupil performance, impacts on the school as an organization, etc.)

are of interest and also available. A variety of statistical analysis procedures are available in common computer analysis packages to provide a basis for this type of attribution, but computers are by no means required for evaluation.

Communication during Implementation

We urge that some regular *opportunities for feedback* from parents, teachers and administrators be part of the evaluation. Student feedback will be immediate, direct, and relevant to virtually all aspects of the new program. Parent feedback is perhaps more salient than school staff might like when parents come to school to discuss problems; PTO and PAC meetings can also be highly informative.

But feedback from teachers may get lost in teachers' lounge gripes unless it is actively sought and provided with "safe" channels. Alexander and George (1981) suggest a variety of mechanisms for obtaining teacher feedback, ranging from opinion polls to such unobtrusive indicators as teacher absenteeism and tardiness, percentage of teachers who are voluntarily remaining after school to chat with pupils, etc.

It is also important for teachers to feel their principal is approachable and *actively* supportive during implementation, both for quick resolution of the myriad minor logistical problems which will arise, and to foster a sense of commitment in the teachers. It is incumbent on the principal to see that the new program is implemented as rapidly, fully, and faithfully as possible, but leadership must also be shared with teachers, parents, and particularly with the implementation team.

Final Comments on Implementation

This chapter has summarized the variety of implementation challenges our districts experienced and has offered some methods for coping with them through continuous evaluation and replanning. It should be obvious to all readers by now that the twelve new middle schools in seven districts we studied were a far cry from the aims and the design potential embodied in the middle school concept. We pause here to interpret this and to offer a few ways of getting better results from the change.

All seven districts had boards, administrators and parent leaders who were very pleased with their conversion efforts. With the exception of some teachers and some principals of lower and upper schools who doubted that much of *educational* worth had been accomplished, then, our respondents were imbued with a sense of achievement. The difficulties we have noted were acknowledged but were viewed as things left to be resolved in the future. We have not presumed to conclude that these policy makers and implementors were somehow deluded in their sense of achieving significant educational improvements. We were not evaluating their programs, after all, nor were we able to study the schools they had replaced. We take what they said as a fact.

At the same time, our research design did not enable comparisons with K–8 or junior high programs, nor did we select for deviant cases, that is to say, districts with reputedly exemplary middle schools and others with middle schools the leadership wanted to get removed. We were looking for the ordinary decision, planning, and implementation processes in districts currently involved in them. What we found, therefore, is what we think a school district is most likely to achieve under the kinds of prevailing circumstances we have described. For our seven districts, the change was predominantly deemed to have been worth the effort.

Any discrepancy, then, lies mainly between the potentialities of the concept, and the real world conditions under which it must be realized. Even the basic model of a middle school, not to mention the fully equipped version, generates pressures to change. These are built into the aims and the design itself. Each district responds to as many of these pressures as local traditions and the power environment together allow. Other aspects are deflected, deferred, or ignored, as each district seeks to meet the expectations of its own constituency.

When we visit as strangers and find that the result falls short of the standards embraced by the middle school movement, it is sometimes tempting to conclude that there has been "much ado about nothing," and we think this reasoning has helped to disillusion some advocates and to breed claims among some parents on behalf of a return to the homier simplicities of K–8 schools without special middle programs. Research that contributes to these trends is spurious, in our opinion.

Boards and school administrators in our sample did as much as their resources, knowledge, and local traditions enabled them to do. Planning and evaluation are only now becoming district-wide operations after twenty years, from 1950 to 1970, of simply racing to catch up with rising enrollments. Without these tools in place and in use, middle school implementation will not reach the heights implied by the philosophy, but for the near term there are severe limits on familiarity with these tools. Nearly every parent we interviewed, for example, felt more involved and informed about schooling than she had ever been before, yet *very few* had sharp or clear impressions of the aims yet to be attained. A great deal of evaluation activity, plopped into a stream where little or no such activity went before, could prove very disturbing.

One of the authors of this report grew up in a midwestern town in a house next door to a Frank Lloyd Wright house erected in 1910. As a boy in the 1930s, he used to stand in wonder of its stained glass picture windows, its vast patios, its flat roof, and the way it fitted snugly into its hillside when no other house in town did that. He decided it was an enchanted, magical structure that was not really a mere house but something more. Neighborhood adults, however, explained that "some nut built that mess. It should not have been permitted." A middle school of the highly exemplary kind studied by Alexander and George might produce the same reaction in many communities. And, since a school is far more than an architected facility, its strangeness would lead to a far more drastic fate than the Wright house, which was allowed to stand as a private curiosity.

What most communities created instead, then, is a fairly sturdy "setting in the middle" which looks and operates in rough congruence with the lower and the upper

schools around it. This setting is then perceived as a worthwhile improvement over its predecessor. If a district wants more than this modest result, we believe it can get it by following at least *some* of the planning, implementation, and evaluation practices we have included in this report. These cannot be adopted in full for the same reason that the full feature model does not fit local realities.

There can be a "leveraging" effect, however. Careful selection of the most appropriate planning practices in particular can be done at no additional financial cost. Teacher involvement above all cannot be neglected. The planning can also pare down on the philosophy and build up the detailed specifics so that *what is to result* gets fully developed long in advance. Our report is offered in the conviction that the districts whose officials welcomed us would want other districts to improve upon their pioneering efforts and to get higher yields by reading about their experiences.

We have no doubt that the middle school concept has great educational potential. This potential gets realized to greater or lesser extent in the course of the processes and realities we have described. The serious challenges to be met in bringing a good middle school into being should not become excuses for inaction.

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